

THE HERMENEUTICS OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING : A COMMUNICATIVE-NARRATIVE SYMBIOSIS

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by
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*Dedicated
to
My Parents*

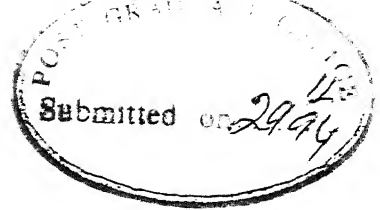
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SYNOPSIS

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The thesis explores the possibility of developing a plausible account of the self and self-understanding within the framework of hermeneutic philosophy. What inspires us to theorize on the nature of the self is our observation that two distinct theories that have emerged in recent hermeneutic philosophy are to be deemed as severally articulating two complementary aspects of a single self-conception.

Hermeneutics has been exploited by Dilthey for epistemological-methodological purposes, whereby the human sciences are accorded a distinctive methodological status comparable to that of the natural sciences. Understanding, however undergoes an ontological reversal in Heidegger's hands and it is thereby recognized to be a mode of existence and not just a mode of knowledge. The ontological characterization of understanding brings about significant changes in the nature of the interpretative task itself. The major point that has been driven home is that an interpreter's own historical situatedness cannot be ignored in any instance of interpretative understanding. Furthermore, a hermeneutic exercise is immanently self-referential, which means that in a hermeneutic event the

interpreter is able to reflect upon his own "interpretative repertoire" operative in the hermeneutic act.

That self-understanding is an inbuilt feature of every hermeneutic inquiry finds its *raison d'être* in Heidegger's celebrated phrase — "Being-in-the-world". Being-in-the-world which Heidegger calls Dasein, is intended to be understood as a concept that directly displaces the classical epistemological-metaphysical portrayal of the subject (or the self) as a cognitively sealed subject fully extrinsic to the world it dwells in. The self is now conceived as hermeneutic subject which understands itself only by way of interpreting the world, the historically conditioned world, it exists in. However, Heidegger's concern reaches beyond the portrayal of the subject to a deeper understanding of the meaning of Being as such — a question which has been seriously neglected throughout the history of western metaphysics.

Although Heidegger's ontological account of understanding (that is, understanding as a mode of human existence) stresses the historical rootedness of the human subject, he is least concerned with historical knowledge operative at the surface level of the *lebenswelt*. This leaves a wide gap between historical understanding and the notion of primordial understanding in his philosophy.

Having noticed this lacuna in Heidegger, Ricoeur attempts to provide a fuller theory that is expected to supplement the programme of fundamental ontology. His argument is that the

epistemic role of understanding involved in grasping the significations of the symbolically constituted socio-cultural world is a necessary mediation in arriving at the ontological truth about human existence. Being symbolically constituted, human-historical reality requires interpretation as a necessary method to appropriate the fundamental truth of human reality. In emphasising the significant role of historical understanding in the pursuit of truth, Ricoeur stresses the unity of the epistemology of interpretation that underpins historical knowledge and the ontology of understanding which characterizes the essence of the human mode of existence.

We explore the nature of self-understanding by keeping in mind this intimacy between the epistemological and the ontological aspects of understanding. Our examination of Gadamer's and Ricoeur's works, in this regard, enables us to appreciate the two ways in which the idea of self-understanding has been developed in hermeneutic philosophy.

Chapter I delineates the primary motivations lying behind the genesis of hermeneutics and its original disciplinary status. This is followed by an account of Dilthey's philosophical appreciation of hermeneutics and also of his contention that hermeneutics constitutes a methodological approach to the study of the human sciences in general. We then criticise Dilthey's hermeneutic programme of the human sciences by drawing attention to certain paradoxical beliefs implicit in his account, which are brought to light by Gadamer. But since the critical scrutiny of

Dilthey's work finds its locus in Heidegger's thought, the discussion held here sets the stage for an examination of some of the central ideas of Heidegger's existential phenomenology in the following chapter.

Chapter II takes up for discussion Heidegger's concept of "Being-there", which is his central ontological inquiry into the meaning of Being. Also, the idea of "thrown-projection", which constitutes the essential nature of understanding explained by reference to the two seemingly mutually inconsistent features of "thrownness" and "projection of possibilities", is extrapolated. Coupled with this discussion is our investigation into post-Heideggerian developments of the idea of the projective character of understanding, exemplified in the concept of "appropriation" expounded by Gadamer and Ricoeur. This development is a clear testimony to the centrality of Heidegger's ontologico-existential analysis of understanding to the growth and proliferation of philosophical hermeneutics.

Chapter III argues for the unity of the epistemological and the ontological aspects of understanding. The crucial point that emerges here is that the hermeneutic enterprise is directed at the ontological truth about human reality and that interpretation is a necessary intermediary for arriving at this ontological truth. There is no royal road to the ontology of understanding other than the epistemology of interpretation. We mainly discuss here Heidegger's existential-phenomenological programme of the "analytic of Dasein" and Ricoeur's proposed "long route" to the

ontology of understanding. By alluding to their common phenomenological foundation, we maintain that it is phenomenology that constitutes both the starting point and the point of departure for their different conceptions regarding the ontology of understanding. Besides appreciating the similarities and differences between the two theories, we argue that Ricoeur's theory provides Heidegger's theory with a desirable supplement and thereby makes an important contribution.

Against the background of what we discuss in Chapter III, we work out two theoretical standpoints regarding the nature of self-understanding. We examine Gadamer's theory of dialogical understanding and Ricoeur's theory of narrative understanding in detail. The former theory believes that the self has a communal-communicative character and that it is only in and through the concrete instances of dialogical situations that one is able to understand oneself. The latter theory holds that life essentially has a narrative structure and it is only through the medium of narrative articulation of one's lived-reality that an individual appropriates what Ricoeur call "narrative identity".

Chapter V is devoted to a critical assessment of the two afore-discussed hermeneutic programmes *vis-a-vis* deconstruction. Our strategy here is not to attempt a counter-critique of deconstruction but to make it clear that the above two theories are in no way committed to the "metaphysics of presence" which is the main target of deconstructive critique, and thereby bypass objections that are likely to be raised from the deconstructive

standpoint. Besides, we also argue that while the specific character of hermeneutic philosophy is constructive, its constructivism can be shown to be rightly consistent with the general spirit of deconstruction.

Chapter VI is our own attempt to construct a new hermeneutic theory of self-understanding by conceiving of the communicative and the narrative dimensions of understanding as symbiotically related to one another. Rather than taking these two dimensions as constitutive of two independent theories, they must be considered, as we argue, to be the two interconnected profiles of a dual-aspect theory of self-understanding. It is one and the same face of self-identity, as it were, that presents one profile representing the public, intersubjectively conditioned self-image and another profile depicting the inner, personal spectrum of the self. It is such an integrated, double-profiled, communicative-narrative self-portrayal of the human individual that constitutes the cornerstone of a comprehensive hermeneutic theory of self-understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

As a major point of concern for philosophers who are naturally required to deal with the epistemologico-methodological problems of philosophy, the notion of "understanding" has drawn wide attention in contemporary philosophy. A particularly appropriate context in which this concept has gained great importance is the methodological debate between the human sciences and the natural sciences. It has been argued quite forcefully and innovatively that while our knowledge about "meaningless" natural phenomena is sought to be acquired by virtue of causal explanation, we must adopt the method or approach of understanding if we are to gain proper knowledge of meaningful human phenomena. Human phenomena are to be understood, or made sense of, because the socially constructed human world is the collective expression of the human mind. Thus, what we identify as social reality is meaning-impregnated, and grasping its meaning depends upon an understanding of the intentional repertoire — consisting of the human agent's beliefs, desires, intentions, emotions and other attitudes — which underlie and animate that reality into a historically circumscribed human reality.

In this thesis our aim is not that of examining the methodological issues involved in the systematic contrast between the two sciences, namely Geisteswissenschaften and Naturwissenschaften, but to take the hermeneutic character of human sciences as a point of departure, in order that the role and significance of understanding in human studies can be so inquired

into as to enable us to develop both a theory of the human subject (or self-conception) and of self-understanding.

As we explore the history of hermeneutics starting with Schleiermacher, we find that the philosophical potential of hermeneutics, is first recognized by Dilthey. His chief contention is that the human sciences deserve to claim a respectable measure of autonomy by virtue of their possession of the distinctive method of *Verstehen*. And the methodology of *Verstehen* is as he holds, comparable to the already well-established natural-scientific methodology of *Erklaren*. Granted this philosophical characterization of the human sciences through the epistemology of interpretative understanding, Dilthey has been criticized for harbouring the mistaken belief that the method of understanding can attain objective certainty in human matters. This belief in the possibility of objective knowledge betrays his own appreciation that the understanding of human social reality is essentially historical. For historicity so delimits and saturates both the interpreter and the interpreted situation as to frustrate the expectation of epistemic transparency through detached inquiry.

It is the historicity of the human world and the historically conditioned effort of the human mind to understand itself through an understanding of its larger existential background that provides actual conceptual setting for the articulation of a theory of understanding. None illustrates this conceptual setting in greater philosophical depth than Heidegger does in his

onto-phenomenological investigation into the meaning of Being. While Dilthey delineates understanding as a cognitive-epistemological attribute of the human subject, Heidegger's radical view construes understanding as an ontological attribute, that is as a mode of existence. It is not just that the human subject employs understanding in its epistemic relation with its life-world; the fundamental truth is that human existence is defined by the fact that the human subject understands itself in its worldliness.

Heidegger's ontological construal of understanding is bound up with his idea of human being's "thrownness" in the world and the idea of their self-disclosure in the "projection of possibilities". While thrownness is indicative of the human subject's inevitably being delimited in its self-understanding by its rootedness in a world already historically conditioned, the feature of the projection of possibilities is suggestive of the fact that the subject conceives of itself as necessarily understanding itself in terms of what it can possibly become. The possibilities projected by the understanding are that of the subject's mode of developing itself beyond what it already is in any moment of its historical existence. In other words, though the human individual is always condemned to be in a world which is already historically defined, he is nevertheless in a process of becoming in the modality of understanding such that his understanding projects various possibilities for the development of his self-understanding.

It is the projective character of understanding, set against the human individual's rootedness in the contingencies of history, that has become a springboard to a significant post-Heideggerian development in hermeneutic philosophy. It is the new exploration into and extrapolation of the idea of "appropriation", attributable both to Gadamer and Ricoeur, that has emerged theoretically as a Heidegger-based hermeneutics of self-understanding and self-interpretation. When, for instance, a hermeneutic object such as a literary text is interpreted, the interpretative act is not just a cognitive exercise of making sense of the content of the text. That is to say, this act is not just that of appropriating the meaning of the text. It is also, and more importantly, a moment of appropriating existential possibilities, or possible life-worlds, projected in the referential dimension of the text. It is the latter mode of appropriation that pertains to the ontology of understanding. Similarly, in a communicative encounter one participant does not merely become cognizant of the meaning of what the other says. One also "applies" the interpretatively understood representational content (i.e., belief, point of view etc.) of what the other says to reconstitute one's own existential standpoint.

A further feature of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics is that self-understanding is not an unmediated, intuitive awareness of the self, but an essentially world-mediated, interpretative attempt which is at once a mode of knowing and a mode of being.

Of course the seed of this new conception of self-understanding is Heidegger's key notion of Being-in-the-world. But what is new in the post-Heideggerian development is that understanding is taken to be mediated by the world conceived in linguistic or symbolic terms. Understanding is shot through with language or sign systems because the life-world is, in some sense, constituted by linguistic-symbolic categories and images. Given this idea that the world is linguistically or symbolically constituted, the self is bound to be represented as textured by language, whence it follows that the link between self-understanding and language is intimate.

Since the human world is inherently invested with symbolic significance, which in turn is embodied in as well as transmitted through human language for human appreciation, Ricoeur has particularly stressed the need for interpretative understanding of human reality. It is on this point that he differs from Heidegger on the question of the ontological status of understanding. While Heidegger's is a "short and direct" route to the fundamental ontological truth about understanding being the essential or primordial mode of human existence, a route which does not pass through an epistemological phase of interpretation, Ricoeur recommends a "long and indirect" journey that involves continual interpretation and reinterpretation of the symbolically constituted signifying reality. Thus Ricoeur supplements Heidegger's phenomenological ontology with a hermeneutic programme, and this programme underlines the role of language in as much as interpretation is a linguistic activity.

This feature of recent hermeneutic philosophy can plausibly be described as a kind of "linguistic turn". Both Gadamer and Ricoeur are pioneers of this turn, and they have theorized in their distinctive styles and orientations on the nature of the self and self-understanding from this "linguistic-hermeneutic" perspective.

Gadamer situates the self or the human agent in a dialogical or communicative nexus. Dialogicality is considered to be an existential modality, and not just a property of human individuals as cognitive subjects. To be oneself as an agent is, necessarily, to be the I of an inseparable I-thou conversational complex. The self is always identified by reference to its co-participation in a communicative situation with the other co-participant, and both understanding the life-world and self-understanding are possible only in the conversational matrix. The ontological implication of this theory is the conversational essence and unity of mankind.

For Ricoeur the human individual is enmeshed in a world constituted by socio-cultural symbols and other sign-systems, such that all understanding, including self-understanding, is possible through the interpretative mediation of the symbolically textured life-world. Self-constitution is a constructive act of narrative self-interpretation in the sense that it is only by virtue of a narrative rendering of one's lived-temporality that one self-understands. Narrative understanding is the proper mode of understanding life because the thread of life is a narrative one, and the life of an individual is an inward quest for a narrative.

Personal identity is not a matter of the persistence of a substantial self through temporal changes of life-events, but the composition of a narrative configuration out of the disparate experiences occurring in the flow of life. Personal identity is narrative identity rather than substantive identity.

Gadamer and Ricoeur are thus two foremost representatives of contemporary hermeneutic theories of self-understanding both of which are embedded in Heideggerian ontology of understanding. Here we may pause and consider whether these two hermeneutic theories run the risk of being vulnerable to the contemporary iconoclastic critique of deconstruction. For talk about self-understanding entails reference to the self as that which understands itself, which in turn entails talk about self-identity. Deconstruction is an attempt to demonstrate that the notion of identity or sameness is incoherent because it survives under the false presupposition of the "metaphysics of presence". It might therefore appear as though both Gadamer's and Ricoeur's theories are liable to be subverted. But this fear may be unfounded, for neither hermeneutic theory is really committed to the metaphysics of presence. The hermeneutic conception of self-identity does not invoke the idea of an immutable substance subsisting through discrete mental events. Rather the identity of the self is conceived in non-metaphysical terms of dialogical and narrative composition.

Given this non-metaphysical, non-substantial compositional modes of self-representation on the part of Gadamer and Ricoeur,

it becomes necessary to examine whether the dialogical and the narrative theories of self-understanding are to be recognized as two separate ways of reflecting upon the nature of the self. We have found reasons to believe that it would be wrong merely to juxtapose these two theories as independent theories of self-understanding. Rather we ought to integrate the two theories into a single unitary theory which encompasses the two inseparable identity-profiles of a single figure — that is the figure of the human self. In other words, it would be more appropriate to assimilate the two distinct theoretic perspectives on self-understanding into a common, unitary view which at once presents two profiles of self-identity — one of the social or public, inter-subjective dimension, and the other of the inner, personal, intra-subjective dimension.

Gadamer's dialogical theory is emphatic upon the socio-communal dimension of self-identity in as much as the existential essence of the self is determined by its communicative — and therefore intersubjective — relation with its conversational co-participant. It is as an integral part of the conversational unity of mankind that the individual's self-identity is highlighted. Hence the dialogical view brings into prominence the "outer" or "public" aspect of the individual's existential identity. But it must be admitted that apart from the wider intersubjective setting of self-identity, the individual also has its identity which is intrasubjective and therefore "inner" or "personal". There is thus a singular narrative to each

individual subject, a narrative that embodies the significant impression of, to adopt a phrase made famous by Thomas Nagel (1974), what it is like to be a person living a life of experiences and episodes invested with meaning. Every individual is an irreplaceable subject of the history of his own life, and the meaning of that personal history is irreducibly his own.

As such a subject, what it is like for me to be myself, to own my personal subjectivity, is not an inter-subjectively shared impression; it rather is an "unshared" self-representation accessible in the mode of solitary awareness. Just as intersubjectivity is the matrix for projecting the communal profile of self-identity, it is intrasubjectivity that forms the inner space within which the subject's individuality, or the personal dimension of self-identity, finds its distinct anchorage.

Ricoeur's narrative theory provides the suitable vantage point from which the intra-subjectively grounded personal dimension of self-identity can be aptly represented. To characterize self-identity as narrative identity, or to talk about narrative self-constitution, is to project the inner, individual profile of self-identity. Even though the narrative of any one's life is part of an inter-locking set of narratives prevalent in the larger background of social reality, the narrative composition of each individual's life is finally attributable to an individual consciousness animated by an inward personal quest for a narrative identity.

If the above considerations and arguments concerning the dual-aspect portrayal of the image of self-identity and self-constitution are on the right track, then we should construct a composite theory of self-understanding, in which the dialogical and the narrative modes of self-representation as reconstructed by us are two interdependent, symbiotically related aspects of the human subject.

CHAPTER I

Hermeneutics: Historical Background And Developments

1.1 Primary Motivations and Presuppositions of Hermeneutics

Interpretation is the key theme of hermeneutics. As a discipline, hermeneutics lays down methodological principles and rules for interpretation. Within its disciplinary boundaries, texts or written documents are considered to be problematic subjects, for which it offers certain interpretative rules and strategies. These techniques are provided not just with a view to dissipating the ambiguous character of such texts, but they also constitute fixed standards for adjudicating between conflicting interpretations. As a matter of fact, the primary motivation of the Romantic hermeneutics is to reassure "the" interpretation of a text. However, hermeneutics never claims to be a perfect art, let alone a science.

F.D.E. Schleiermacher, the founder of hermeneutics, highlights two motivating themes for channelising this programme. His first belief is that misunderstanding is natural in any reading of a text; thus, there must be some device to do away with confusions, wrong interpretations and so on. This belief itself is grafted upon a more profound conviction that misunderstanding is an integral part of understanding. Thus, for Schleiermacher, hermeneutics — "which is an art of avoiding misunderstanding" — is not confined to textual interpretation only, but has a universal scope. The universality of misunderstanding thus demands that it must be avoided at every point. His second perception is that the gap between the historical situation of the text and its

interpreters is responsible, to a great extent, for misconceptions. He believes that this historico-temporal gap can be overcome through a proper methodology. Besides these two guiding factors, Schleiermacher's conception of "understanding" functions in an important way. For him interpretation means reconstruction or reproduction of the original meaning. In a way, what he hints at is that the attainment of "objectivity" or certainty must be ensured in the interpretation of a text. However, he resists the temptation to describe hermeneutics as a science and instead insists that it is an art which one must practice on one's own. The more a person practices it, the more authentic results he is likely to get. So, he emphasises personal efforts in this direction.

Schleiermacher's original contribution lies in recognizing two interdependent parts of interpretation. He describes them as grammatical and technical or psychological interpretations. A work is not divided into parts where two interpretations are at work separately. Instead, they are heavily dependent on each other. Although a lot of ambiguities and confusions can be dealt with through one's linguistic expertise, the actual meaning of a text, Schleiermacher concedes, is not grasped until the motivating theme of the work is first recognized. The "motivating theme" here works as a "whole" — a whole which governs the interpretative movement throughout the text and, in turn, is revised and reformulated in the light of the parts. This principle of the "hermeneutical circle" is thus an ineliminable part of any hermeneutic reading,

which is certainly facilitated by the rules laid down for grammatical interpretation.

A text is both tradition-bound and a creation of its author's free and unbounded imagination. Since it belongs to a particular tradition, it is necessary that the work must be placed in the original tradition or genre without overlooking the contributions made by other influential genres. Besides comparative study, Schleiermacher specifically draws our attention to the author's individualistic and innovative style which, in his view, is to be taken seriously.¹ In fact, it is the imaginative and creative abundance that distinguishes a literary work from its scientific counterpart. Unlike the fixity and rigidity of a scientific discourse, an aesthetic creation ventures into a free world of imagination, thus enables us to see numerous possible "worlds".

Having recognized the essential psychological aspect of a (non-scientific) text, Schleiermacher introduces the concept of "divination". By divination he means an imaginative reproduction of the original idea and thoughts of the author. In Gadamer's interpretation,

¹In arguing that a text is not only a linguistic construction but also a work of its author's mind, Schleiermacher is drawn to one of the three conceptions of understanding given by his predecessor Friedrich Ast. They are: (i) historical understanding, (ii) grammatical understanding, and (iii) spiritual understanding. It is the third conception of understanding, namely, spiritual understanding which is directed at grasping the spirit (*Geist*) of the individual and that of the age that Schleiermacher is particularly drawn to. Having recognized this important constituent of a text, Schleiermacher sees the need to take the psychological aspect into account. This psychological or technical interpretation hence is as important as grammatical interpretation.

Schleiermacher's particular contribution is psychological interpretation. It is ultimately a divinatory process, a placing of oneself within the mind of the author, an apprehension of the "inner origin" of the composition of a work, a recreation of the creative act (1975, p. 164).

Understanding is said to be the process of the recreation of the original artistic production. This act of reproduction of the original inner ideas, Schleiermacher believes, is methodically possible. What makes psychological interpretation possible is the fact that every artistic creation, along with its individual content and form, is communicated or expressed, and if not, it is essentially communicable or expressible. An expression is that meaningful form which preserves the character of the mind that has produced it. The artistic pleasure derived from poetic innovation is not restricted to oneself. This internal production rather presupposes an external form — a speech addressed to others. Since what is said is inextricably linked with the manner in which it is expressed, the "inner thoughts" and the "speech" constitute the "inner" and the "outer" forms of every artistic creation. Now, what is expressed — an external form — is not simply the immediate manifestation of the thought, but presupposes reflection. The fusion of "inner thoughts" and "expression" as inner and outer forms of artistic production brings hermeneutics close to rhetorics — an art of communication. This alliance between hermeneutics and rhetorics makes the reproduction of the original ideas possible. For the inner psychological realm is

accessible only through these manifested forms.²

If Schleiermacher's methodological design of hermeneutics (psychological interpretation) presupposes the inner-outer fusion, its possible operation seems to be threatened in the case of a work of a genius. The manifested form, and the rules and laws of a tradition which mediate in reconstructing the work, actually show their limits in such a case. For a genius himself creates models and genres. The problem, however, does not seem to be too serious. The Schleiermacherian concept of divination, which Gadamer describes as "immediate solution", constitutes something corresponding to the product of a genius. Only a genius can understand another genius. Nevertheless, the seriousness of the problem further diminishes when we notice that the frontier between what is artistic and what is not, is itself hazy. What this implies is that there always remains the problem of deciding when the rule-free genius is at work and when not. And in so far as individuality — whether mechanical or genial — is at work, it can be assumed that rule-free genius, in a limited sense, is always at work. The presence of individuality in every work thus

²Emilio Betti also has a similar view that it is the unity of the "inner" and the "outer" forms that makes the spiritual relationship with the other possible. In his own words: "the representational function of a meaning-full form which transmits a piece of knowledge need not, by the way, be a conscious one: the meaning-content it carries can be known through its meaning-representational function in such a way that, owing to its mediation, another mind, which is nevertheless closely related to ours, can "speak" to us by addressing our ability to understand with an "appeal". It is possible to enter into a spiritual relationship with one's fellow-men only on the basis of such meaning-full forms which are either given in actual perception or can be evoked as an image in one's memory" (Betti, 1990, p. 160).

consolidates the need for psychological or technical interpretation, besides grammatical interpretation.

But what makes it possible for us to understand the individuation of the author is our common or shared intersubjective character. Thus, an imaginative transposition into the other person is made possible by the common underlying pattern of our social life. Explicating Schleiermacher's conception of understanding, Gadamer writes: "It will be concerned equally with what is common, by comparison, and what is individual, by divination, it will be both comparative and divinatory. But it remains in both respects art, because it cannot be termed into a mechanical application of rules. The divinatory remains an essential ingredient" (1975, p. 167).

Apart from the universality feature of mankind, Schleiermacher makes a further point about psychological interpretation. He, in fact, warns us against taking psychological interpretation, which means placing oneself in the position of the other person, as a matter of simple identification. Although understanding is reproduction, he believes that it goes beyond the original construction and brings to light all those things which even the author himself is not conscious of. It is actually the art of reading which illuminates the dark and obscure portions of the text; the significance of the work is actually brought to light in interpretation. Thus, Schleiermacher gives us another maxim different from divination, namely, "one must understand the author better than what he understands himself".

1.2 Philosophical Appreciation of Hermeneutics in Dilthey

Though initially concerned with textual interpretation, Schleiermacher gradually expands the scope of hermeneutics from the objective comprehension of classical texts to that of any kind of utterances.³ But, Wilhelm Dilthey, a staunch follower of his master Schleiermacher, further widens the scope of hermeneutics to incorporate human actions, social institutions, practices and so on. His intention behind this expansion is to illuminate the nature of the human sciences. With this enlargement of scope, hermeneutics no longer remains confined to the interpretation of texts, but also becomes a general inquiry into the problem of comprehension as such. It is at this juncture that we can appreciate Dilthey's efforts to give hermeneutics a philosophical outlook, and to raise it beyond its earlier narrow disciplinary confines.

Dilthey's philosophical appreciation of hermeneutics lies in recognizing a much greater and deeper force in the "part and whole" relationship than what it was understood to be in earlier hermeneutics. What Dilthey advises is that we approach ourselves as well as others only with the aim of understanding. The human study is an exercise of understanding human beings. And the nature of this understanding is essentially historical, which means that we have to view a person's actions, experiences, motives etc. in a

³ Thus, in advancing a general hermeneutics, and not specific interpretive practices to deal with legal or theological matters, Schleiermacher shows a genuine concern for the fundamental and ubiquitous phenomenon of understanding.

larger historical context. Life is a "development" and this development is "structured" by its specific historicity. What is a present moment of life is always suffused with and shaped by past experiences, and the present stretches onward to the shaping of the future of life. It is the grasping of this temporal structure of lived-reality that amounts to understanding a life.

The backward and forward movement from the present to the past and the future is a process of connecting actions and experiences to the categories of meaning, value, and purpose. The meaningful totality of life-experiences is a configuration designed from the standpoint of certain values and significances. Without any assignment of values and meaning to actions, the temporal flow of life does not yield any pattern. And in the absence of a pattern, life remains a myriad of chaotic events. Thus, Dilthey recognizes that the essential meaningfulness of life — its purposive and goal-directed movement — depends on the availability of what may be termed human-scientific concepts or categories such as the ones mentioned above.

Here, Dilthey exploits the concept of "understanding" (*Verstehen*) *vis-a-vis* the concept of explanation (*Erklaren*) and argues that human nature is such that it cannot be explained in the manner in which physical reality is explained. It can only be "understood" and the epistemology of understanding is characteristically different from that of explanation. But "understanding" is not just a methodological concept contrasted with "explanation"; it is also an ontological concept in that human reality is shaped by understanding. In other words,

understanding is a distinctive constitutive feature of human nature and existence.

Thus, Dilthey approaches hermeneutics with the interest of a philosophical theorist of human nature and the human studies. His major programme therefore is two-fold: first, to bring to light what is distinctively human — in which connection he distinguishes the "mental" realm from the "physical" realm — and, second, to confer an independent status to the sciences which study human nature. These two tasks constitute respectively two major concerns of his philosophy, namely, *Lebensphilosophie* and epistemological and methodological considerations.

In the next section we elucidate Dilthey's views on the epistemological and methodological issues concerning the human sciences.

1.3 Hermeneutics as a Methodology for the Human Sciences

In contrast to the scientific monism of Mill and Durkheim, Dilthey's view of the nature of knowledge is dualistic, a dualism of mind (*Geist*) and nature (*Natur*), which gets systematically expressed in the formally distinguished sciences known as *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*. The social sciences belong to the former categories; they are the "sciences of mind" seeking knowledge of the human world, that is our world, which we know in a way different from our knowledge of non-human nature. Unlike the human world, the physical world is essentially alien to us, and our knowledge of it is correspondingly "external". Hence we always know the nature of physical reality from the outside, as

it were, on the basis of the "external" experience (*Erfahrung*) that we have of natural phenomena. By contrast, the human world is one that we know, as it were, from the inside immediately, from "lived-experience" (*Erlebnis*). It is not an alien, mechanical world, but a world suffused with meaning and values — values which we can in principle share, or can at least understand them empathetically.

Whereas the physical scientist seeks to explain natural phenomena by subsuming particulars under general laws, the practitioner of the human sciences should seek to understand human phenomena as the works and actions of men and women essentially like himself or herself, the expressions of mind (*Geist*) essentially like his or her own. Understanding phenomena as expressions of mind is not like explaining them as the effect of causes, and the human world is not to be understood as a deterministic causal order of necessary uniformities such as natural science has constructed to describe and explain the physical world. Rather, the workings of the mind are purposive (unlike those of blind physical causality), free (at least within limits) of the trammels of necessity, and hence genuinely creative.

The reason why Dilthey maintains a distinction between *Geist* and *Natur*, or what is called historical and ontic, is to seriously attack the hegemony of (the thesis of) positivism. Positivism purports the idea of a unified knowledge which is nothing but natural-scientific knowledge. It is the criteria laid down by the natural sciences which distinguish between what is knowledge, i.e.,

confirmed theories, and what are mere opinions and whims. This thesis was so strongly prevalent in the then European intellectual scene that there was hardly any room for the human sciences.

Dilthey devotes himself completely to liberate the human sciences from strong positivistic grips. He attempts to revive the obvious distinction between *Natur* and *Geist*, which was overlooked because of the heightened enthusiasm of professing the idea of "unified knowledge". What is missed out in explaining the human world in scientifically controlled ways is, according to Dilthey, the essential experiential and symbolically constituted nature of human beings. The world, which is actually a mind-constructed symbolic reality, cannot be reduced to a mere physicality. The creative and imaginative mind and its historical development certainly cannot be captured in a single unilateral schema of things. What is required instead is a serious consideration of the plurality of world-views and their intrinsic developments.

In a similar vein, Dilthey criticises Kant for giving a partial and incomplete account of the theory of knowledge. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a big treatise on understanding the structural design of the human mind. Human mind, according to him, is not a Lockean blank sheet, but has an *a priori* structure of its own. It is due to this *a priori* categorial pattern that the mind gathers and articulates whatever is impinged on the senses. Categories such as time, space, causality are given an unconditional or *a priori* status in the Kantian scheme of things.

The limitation of the Kantian programme is, as Dilthey argues, that it is specifically suitable for natural-scientific

and mathematical knowledge. What is not acknowledged in that epistemological programme is the real historical man and his experiences. Having noticed this lacuna in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Dilthey puts forward his *Critique of Historical Reason*. There are two main objectives of this critique: (i) to illuminate the historical nature of human beings, and (ii) to enunciate the possibility of historical knowledge. In carrying out this programme Dilthey does not intend to throw away the Kantian categories, but points out their inadequacies for capturing the inner experiences of man who is a thinking, willing and imagining being. He seeks to extend the scope of knowledge so as to include the sciences which are about the historically conditioned human social reality. Disapproving of the Kantian categories, he claims that the real categories through which life can be understood emanate only from the living human social reality. No ahistorical and non-empirical or *a priori* features are capable of delineating human nature. Dilthey writes:

No real categories can claim validity in the human studies as does in sciences.... In the historical world there is no scientific causality, for cause implies that a regular effect is necessarily produced; history only knows of the relations of striving and suffering, action and reaction (1976, p. 212).

Life categories have to be essentially *a posteriori*. And they may therefore vary from culture to culture. But this should not mislead us into thinking that Dilthey is propounding the idea of incommensurability. Although human reality presents itself in different cultural forms, this does not, by any means, suggest that understanding is impossible across cultures. In fact, Dilthey

strongly believes in Schleiermacher's thesis of the sharability of human beliefs, customs, and institutional practices — in short, in the commonality of human nature. Schleiermacher says that *each one* of us carries a tiny bit of others within us (See Gadamer, 1976, p. 166). The idea of a common human nature is so important that all of Dilthey's claims about understanding "others" depend upon it.

Dilthey repeatedly says that human beings are socio-culturally conditioned beings. It is a contingent fact about us that we take birth in some cultural surrounding and only within that social parameters do we learn to know ourselves and others. Thus, whatever we know of ourselves is actually through reflections upon our actions and decisions and that of others. As socially and culturally conditioned beings, we first become aware of ourselves in the world which is already understood. There is no self-understanding over and above understanding of our actions and experiences and of others. "I" actually captures itself in "Thou". The others become a mirror in which we can perceive ourselves. Describing the "circuitous route of understanding", Dilthey says:

The psycho-physical unit, man, knows even himself through the same mutual relationship of expression and understanding, he becomes aware of himself in memory as something that once was; but, when he tries hard to hold fast and grasp his states of mind by turning his attention upon himself, the narrow limits of such an introspective method of self-knowledge show themselves; only his actions and creations and the effect they have on others teach man about himself. So he only gains self-knowledge by the circuitous route of understanding (1976, p. 176).

The participative nature of human beings shows that there are certain features which we commonly recognize despite our differences and conflicting frameworks. Dilthey believes that although human history ceaselessly evolves, every epoch witnesses certain features which remain unaffected by the ordinary concerns of human beings. He calls this phenomenon the "objective mind". The objective mind describes the behaviour pattern of a community.

The expressions which reflect the mind are labelled by Dilthey the "objectifications of the mind". Among the expressions or objectifications are individual gestures, words and actions, as well as social institutions, customs, languages, states, churches, legal systems, tools, books, works of art, and so on. These expressions manifest the intersubjective nature of human beings, beings possessed of an "objective mind". It is this objective mind which establishes a link between the individual psyche and socially acceptable behaviour. Dilthey believes that we must capture the mind — the inner experiential form — in the outer expressions. For there is no way to establish direct contact with the inner structural pattern. The inner mind manifests itself in the outer forms which are directly perceptible and can be interpreted.

Dilthey draws out the concept of the "objective mind" from the Hegelian theory of Objective Idealism. But he does so without thereby turning himself into a Hegelian idealist. The concept of the objective mind does not signify a stage in the development of the world-spirit which moves on to absolute realization. Rather, it suggests that human beings are socio-cultural beings who

express themselves in certain ways. Although Dilthey is indebted to Hegel in many respects, he is also a critic of the idea of universal history as a process of self-realization of the realm of human history. History is human history and the mind is the historically developed mind. There is nothing beyond it. Dilthey tries hard to disillusion us of the idea of the ahistorical, Absolute Mind.

The objective mind may be said to be what underlies the mind-constructed reality, which is the human social world or lived-reality. What Dilthey calls the human studies or *Geisteswissenschaften* are studies about this reality. The *Geisteswissenschaften* include everything in which the human mind manifests itself. Dilthey writes:

Mind can only understand what it has created. Nature the subject matter of the physical sciences, embraces the reality which has arisen independently of the activity of mind. Everything on which man actively impressed his stamp forms the subject matter of the human studies (1976, p. 192).

Apart from exploring the nature of the human sciences, Dilthey's aim is to develop a proper methodology for them. He confidently asserts that hermeneutics can constitute an adequate methodology for the human sciences. Though the task of hermeneutics — an art of interpretation — is originally that of interpreting theological and literary texts, Dilthey extends it to incorporate the "things" which are the objectifications of the mind. His positive attitude towards hermeneutics as a method of the human sciences is grounded in his belief that the objectifications of the mind are similar to that of a text. The

homogeneity between a text and the expressions of mind is seen in the fact that both are the results of the creativity of the mind and enjoy a considerable amount of objectivity or permanence.

However, Dilthey also identifies degrees of objectivity. As he writes: "It is in language alone human inwardness finds its complete, exhaustive and objectively comprehensible expression.... The art of understanding therefore centres on the *interpretation of written records of human existence*" (1976, p. 249). He also points out the true and genuine expressions of the human mind, namely the works of a great poet, a religious genius, a philosopher and so on. The recognition of the degree of complexities and objectivities actually guides Dilthey's two programmes of understanding, namely, elementary and higher understanding. The former is taken to be operative in day-to-day life in which we understand each other and respond accordingly in an unproblematic way. But there are cases and contexts of complexity which leave unobvious what their real meanings or intentions are, and these require higher understanding on our part. The objectifications of the mind are regarded to be such cases and contexts.

Dilthey's desire for a methodology is not so overriding as to impel him to abolish subjective consciousness or the ego of individual human beings. But, at the same time, the thought of the possibility of a method in the human sciences tends to lead him to attribute scientific or quasi-scientific objectivity to them. This puts him in a paradoxical situation in that the human sciences then seem to require to retain both human subjectivity and

scientific objectivity at once. And for this reason he has been criticised by many. Nevertheless, Dilthey plays a foundational role in developing hermeneutics as a philosophical theory of understanding human phenomena and thereby draws intellectual attention to the possibility of insightful researches in the human sciences in ways that may do justice to the voices of our lived experiences.

1.4 Hermeneutics as a Critique of Methodology

If the human sciences are attempts to study and draw important conclusions about human nature, then they must seek a firm footing in what Dilthey describes as *lebensphilosophie*, i.e., philosophical reflection on life. This belief is the motivation that underlies Dilthey's efforts to provide a philosophical foundation for the human sciences. The first thing he tries, following Husserl, is to clearly demarcate between lived-experiences (*Erlebnis*) and scientific experiences (*Erfahrung*). Scientific experiences acquire meaning only when they become scientific laws through repeated observations. Once they obtain a form of established theories, their validity is not so easily under question. *Erlebnis*, on the other hand, are experiences of real historical beings and have meaning only within the "totality of experiences". Unlike scientific experiences where observation and facts are separate, experiential beings and their experiences are fused with one another in the case of *Erlebnis*. In the latter, consciousness is not distinct from what it is consciousness of. In other words, there is an immanent reflectivity of the consciousness of life. Yet there is not an

absolute identity between consciousness and its objects. For life understands itself in terms of its own created world, which is the historical life-world. In other words, self-understanding is essentially mediated by the historical context in which the individual is situated.

The distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* is not a superfluous one. A deeper reflection into *Erlebnis* makes it evident that there is a certainty in it which in no way is less scientific in nature. Since there is no chasm between consciousness and the object of consciousness, the conscious subject acquires infallible inner certainty about the content of consciousness. Thus, comparable to the certainty which a scientist obtains indirectly through controlled means, one can acquire a phenomenological certainty, through reflective self-consciousness, in the immediacy of one's lived experiences. This reflectivity of life is an inward movement governed by a desire to transcend doubts, ambiguities and uncertainties of life so as to achieve clarity and transparency. The objectifications of the mind are expressions of this deep-rooted desire of mankind. Religion, art, philosophy, language, customs etc. are expressions of human history and not of the Hegelian Absolute Mind.

We can thus see that Dilthey's unique contribution to the idea of the autonomy of the human sciences involves a two-fold emancipatory programme. On the one hand, he intends to rescue human history from its being subordinated to the ahistorical scientific treatment of positivism. On the other hand, he wishes to preserve the empirical, human character of the contents of

human history from its being distorted by the Hegelian metaphysical or transcendental theory of the Absolute Mind. What finally emerges from this overall attempt is a post-Kantian critique of historical reason and knowledge.

Among the objective expressions of the mind which are the object of the human studies, one particular expression is taken by Dilthey to be paradigmatic — namely, language, or more specifically, its permanent form, i.e., written texts. "In language alone human inwardness finds its complete, exhaustive and objectively comprehensible expression.... The art of understanding therefore centers on the interpretation of the human existence" (Dilthey, 1976, p. 249). The methodology of textual interpretation (*auslegung*) — namely hermeneutics — is therefore proposed by Dilthey as the basis for a model of understanding in the human sciences in general. Human social phenomena in general should be treated as if they were texts to be interpreted. After all, the historical world of human actions and events is a mind-constructed world, and being a creation of the mind this world is essentially meaningful. And language is obviously the bearer of meaning par excellence. Hence the meaningful human life can aptly be described as a text — the text of life — always lying open to interpretation and understanding.

Perhaps Dilthey's major specific application to the human sciences of his hermeneutic methodology concerns the relation of part and whole. The parts of a text have a meaningful relation to each other, so that the text is a meaningful whole, understandable in a sense that has nothing to do with the relation of cause and

effect. This is connected with the so-called hermeneutic circle — the fact that in the interpretation of a problematic text the meaning of a whole depends on the meaning of the parts, yet the parts cannot be fully understood except within the context of the whole. Hence adequate understanding of a text requires a two-way shuttling between the parts and the whole as a focus of the investigator's attention. Something similar applies, Dilthey suggests, to the systems studied by the social scientists. As he writes: "Each [expression of life] is a whole with parts and a part of a whole.... It is significant, through this double relationship, as a link in a greater whole" (Dilthey, 1976, p. 240). Likewise, "every action, every thought, every common activity, in short, every part of [a] historical whole has its significance through its relationship to the whole of the epoch" (*op cit.*, 1976, p. 198).

It is more or less evident that, though Dilthey plays a pioneering role in rescuing the human studies from the scientism of positivism, yet there runs a strong undercurrent of a quasi-scientific belief in certainty and objectivity through his *lebensphilosophie*. He seems to be under the strong impression that, despite the use of a non-scientific method — namely hermeneutics or interpretative understanding (*Verstehen*) — in the study of human or social phenomena, the human sciences can yield insightful conclusions about human nature which are considerably certain and objective. This is mainly because interpretative understanding is grounded in, and derives its sustenance from, "lived-experience"; and the investigator's search is, as it were,

launched from the inside, in that his or her "lived-experience" enables unmediated access to the essence of human phenomena. As such, the human sciences can also claim to have a solid epistemic foundation provided by the phenomenology of *Verstehen*. It is this view of the human sciences that reflects Dilthey's inability to exorcise the Cartesian obsession with a firm and solid foundation upon which the edifice of the knowledge of human nature is to be built. As Gadamer puts it: "the certainty of science is, for him, the culminating form of the certainty of life" (1975, p. 221).

Gadamer is not critical of Dilthey's overall programme which rests upon a due emphasis on the immanent reflectivity of life; nor is he unsympathetic to the idea of the objectifications of the mind which emerge from history. But it is Dilthey's invulnerable faith in science, accompanied by an irrefutable need for Cartesian foundationalism, that makes him a target of criticism. The following remarks make Gadamer's point clear:

The need for something firm in Dilthey has the character of a definite need for protection from frightful realities of life. But he expects the overcoming of the uncertainty and unsureness of life to come not so much from the stability that the experiences of life provides, but from science (1975, p. 221).

The point that Gadamer intends to bring to light is Dilthey's paradoxical expectation of a definite, systematic and objective account of the historically conditioned social phenomena, or human life as such, which is surreptitiously modelled upon the results obtained through the use of the ahistorical methodology of science. This is an ironical paradox in that while, on the one hand, Dilthey initiates his programme by an explicit rejection of

positivistic scientism with the aim of placing the human sciences in lived experience and historical consciousness, he fails, on the other hand, to detach himself from the desire to achieve, in the human sciences, methodological certainty of a kind that is alien to historical consciousness and reason.

The question that motivates Gadamer's critique of Dilthey is whether the truth that the human sciences aim at can ever be attained through any method. This is also the question of whether understanding social phenomena or human life can in any sense be construed in strict methodological terms; whether, that is to say, historical reason or knowledge has the potentiality of being amenable to rational and objective methodology. Gadamer wants to join Dilthey on the project of founding the human sciences upon lived-experience and historical consciousness; but he is sceptical about the possibility of a presuppositionless, objective interpretative understanding of social reality. Thus, the focal point of critical attention, on Gadamer's part, is the nature of understanding as it relates to the historically conditioned or culturally specific existence of mankind.

Gadamer's critique of Dilthey directs its criticism against the Enlightenment belief which functions as a supportive ground for Dilthey's programme of providing a methodology for the human sciences. The Enlightenment ideal perceives knowledge or reason as distinct from unexamined beliefs and opinions. Gadamer considers this high ideal of situating knowledge in a place severed from all ordinary conceptions to be entirely misconceived. The whole idea of arriving at "thingness" by bracketing out our fore-conceptions

and prejudices is a mere fancy. What it fails to take into notice is, according to Gadamer, the positive aspect of the beliefs and conceptions we acquire by virtue of belonging to a specific tradition. Following Heidegger, Gadamer argues that the "worldliness" or "historical belongingness" is a necessary fact about human existence. Our disclosure to the world as well as to ourselves is possible only through our cultural situatedness.

Thus, tradition has an inevitable role to play in understanding, and any attempt to transcend it is to rob understanding of its essential nature. It is not just a vain attempt, but desiring to attain objective truth is actually asking for the complete epistemological purgation of the cognitive subject. In other words, the desire for total knowledge is a desire to obtain total self-transparency. But as Gadamer argues, in so far as the cognitive subject always finds itself rooted in a certain tradition, the aspiration of complete transparency is mere wishful thinking.

This conception of knowledge, based on the Enlightenment ideal, overlooks the fact of the historicity of human existence — the fact about our being situated in an already historically defined and interpreted world. This feature of historical situatedness, argues Gadamer, cannot be denied even in the case of scientific inquiries. A working scientist always finds himself situated in a particular paradigm which sets the rules and norms for carrying out scientific activities as well as judging their validity. Although a scientist exercises his freedom to manipulate the world according to his wishes, his creative individuality is

ultimately sanctioned by the norms defined within the prevailing scientific community. What becomes clear is that the historico-hermeneutic conditioning of understanding is all pervasive and is such that it resists total methodization. In other words, all knowledge is essentially historical and therefore never completely segregated from the vagaries or contingencies of historical existence.

Drawing upon Heidegger's existential-phenomenological account of *Dasein* as historically rooted, Gadamer says that we human beings grow in and through the "historically understood" world. In his words:

In truth history does not belong to us but instead we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves reflective, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way through the family, society and state in which we live (Gadamer, 1975, p. 261).

The tradition which we inherit by belonging to a specific socio-cultural situation invariably influences our thinking and actions; but it also escapes our full grasp. All our conscious efforts to understand ourselves and our history fall short of attaining completeness simply because we constantly grow with the tradition we are immersed in. At no point of time is it possible for us to detach ourselves completely from the social scheme and launch an objective inquiry towards it. Since we cannot come out of history, our self-knowledge is *mutatis mutandis* incomplete and inexhaustive. The truth about historical knowledge is that of belonging to history and not that of objectifying it. Weinsheimer characterizes this fact of the incompleteness of historical consciousness, which transcends absolute methodization, as "hap".

Hap functions not only negatively, as a lamentable imperfection in epistemology. Even if it escapes methodological manipulation, it is not for Gadamer merely a matter of chance. Rather hap is a remainder of the primordial unity of self and world that method, however rigorous, is not entirely able to break up. For this reason, hap points the way home — or rather, is already there. When we happen upon something true, something that possesses an immediate certitude, though it cannot be methodically certified, then we already belong to and participate in the *Geschehen der Wahrheit*, the happening or truth. We belong to history (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 15).

Two points about understanding — its historical situatedness and a never-ending exploratory character — constitute the very heart of Gadamer's critique of Dilthey. A serious flaw which Gadamer points out in Dilthey's philosophical framework is that of treating history as a complete and thus a closed text which he arrives at via the notion of objectifications of the mind. As a text-analogue, history appears to be a finished product of the human mind: a work which analogously will have a beginning, a middle and an end. It thus appears to be outside the temporal flow which one can lay one's hands on at any time. Although the assignment of the textual character to history is seen by Dilthey as a methodological requirement, it leads to another methodological problem, namely, that of distinguishing between correct and incorrect interpretations. Dilthey himself confronts this problem with great difficulty.

It is at this point that Gadamer charges Dilthey of a crucial distortion of man's essential historicity. By treating history as a text, argues Gadamer, Dilthey transposes "concrete historical subjects" into "abstract logical subjects". In order to arrive at the objective and accurate results in the human sciences, Dilthey

constructs the notion of the "objective mind". For no objective "truths" can be achieved unless the object of inquiry itself displays the objective contents. Dilthey's notion of "objective mind" is built upon this principle. The "objectifications of the mind" are the abstractions from the living contingent historical reality, turning the actual experiential beings into the logical subjects, thus making the scientific treatment of the human-emotional reality possible.

In consequence, the project of understanding or re-living the experiences of real historical beings loses its meaning. The entire Diltheyan project of protecting the historical mental realm against the intrusion of positivistic scientism looks self-stultifying; for the introduction of a methodology geared to obtaining objective certainty in human historical phenomena goes against the grain of historicity itself. This sort of methodological intent has the implication of treating the human subject in abstraction from its concrete historical locus, which amounts to a betrayal of understanding the nature of the subject as a "willing, thinking and imagining" being deeply enmeshed in tradition. Explaining how Dilthey's methodological attempts put the individual experiential historicity at stake, Gadamer writes:

The important step for Dilthey's epistemological groundwork of the human sciences is the transition from the structure of continuity in the experience of an individual life to historical continuity, which is not experienced by any individual at all. Here - despite all the critique of speculation - it is necessary to put 'logical subject' instead of 'real subject'. Dilthey is aware of this difficulty, but he considers that it is a permissible thing to do, in that the similarity between individuals - as in the case of one generation or one nation - represents a spiritual reality that must be

recognised as such precisely because it is not possible to get behind it in order to explain it. True, this is not a real subject; that is, evident enough from the vagueness of its boundaries. Moreover, individuals are involved in it with a part of their being only (1975, pp. 197-98).

Gadamer's critical views and reflections owe their allegiance to the philosophy of Heidegger. Hence it will be appropriate to enter into Heidegger's existential-phenomenological reflections on the nature of human reality. We shall discuss his views in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

The Ontological Turn: From the Epistemology of Interpretation to the Ontology of Understanding

2.1 Dasein: Being-There

A philosopher whose importance can in no way be overlooked in accounting for the development of hermeneutics is Martin Heidegger. Although Heidegger is not directly associated with hermeneutics in so far as its disciplinary status is concerned, indirectly his existential-phenomenological views contribute substantially to the development of hermeneutics. Understanding — the central theme of hermeneutics — takes a new turn when Heidegger characterizes it in ontological terms. The context in which such a change takes place is the analysis of the fundamental question of philosophy — the question of the meaning of Being. The ontological characterization, as a consequence of which the concept of understanding acquires a philosophically deeper significance and no longer remains merely as a methodological principle, is the thesis that understanding is not just a cognitive mode, or a mode of knowing the nature of human phenomena, but an existential mode, a mode of being, in that it crucially characterizes and determines human existence.

We discussed in the earlier chapter Dilthey's struggle with the epistemological and methodological problems concerning the human sciences, and also Gadamer's criticism of Dilthey. It is now to be seen how Heidegger provides the real basis for Gadamer's critique of Dilthey. Besides, it is to be shown that both Gadamer

and Ricoeur try to connect hermeneutics with Heideggerian existentialism.

The primary task of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, the most fundamental among his works, is to reestablish the importance of the most profound question of philosophy. This question is that of the meaning of Being, i.e., what it is to be or what it means to exist. In an attempt to reawaken this question, Heidegger first criticises the existing metaphysical theories on the ground that they all neglect this ontological question. He unearths three major presuppositions in the traditional metaphysical theories.

First, Being is taken as a universal concept which transcends even the universality of the genus. Since Being is the highest of all concepts and it does not participate in something higher than itself, it is considered to be unproblematic. The second enigma, which straightaway follows from the first, is that since Being is the supreme concept, it transcends all descriptions and definitions. To put it differently, Being is indefinable. The third presumption regarding Being is that, of all the concepts, Being is the one that is most clear and self-evident. It is presumed that we all know what Being is when we make assertions, or when we "comport" ourselves towards entities.

Heidegger claims that these alleged enigmas about Being — its supreme universality, indefinability and self-evident character — still cannot prevent us from inquiring into its meaning. He feels the utmost need to investigate the issue; for, paradoxically speaking, it is the most obscure question despite the fact that we seem to be fairly acquainted with it.

In unearthing the presumptions of the traditional theories, Heidegger does not intend to rule them out and lay a completely new foundation. Rather, he intends to show that the question is still enormously obscure and requires a great deal of efforts to comprehend it. Thus, Heidegger decides to take up the question of Being from the protected field of traditional theories and lays it open to new investigation. He notices that many a time such efforts do not receive due respect because of the fear of groundlessness. Heidegger himself does not make any attempt to eliminate the traditional theories completely, but he insists that we must guard ourselves against the blind acceptance of the tradition.

It is the traditional metaphysical idea of the "self-evidence of Being" that constitutes the central point of Heidegger's critical examination of the traditional theories. He unflinchingly claims that Being is ontically the closest thing and yet it is ontologically the obscurest. In carrying out the ontological investigation, he first posits an entity which he calls Dasein and lays bare its various aspects. Before we explore what Dasein is and what are its structural features, it would be appropriate first to examine the necessity of positing this entity.

In our ordinary understanding of the nature of Being we concede that Being is always the being of some entity. We seem to understand the meaning of what it is to be or to exist in terms of the existence of entities. In order to reconstruct this notion of common understanding, Heidegger feels the need of positing an entity in terms of which he can then inquire into the meaning of

Being. He also considers it necessary to posit this entity in order to differentiate, ontologically, between this entity Dasein which questions its own being and all other entities — a contrast which allows him to investigate the ontological problem both elaborately and deeply.

Besides, Heidegger draws our attention to a very general point. In carrying out any task, we, as a matter of fact, first lay out the project and then proceed step by step. So there is a prior knowledge of what we intend to do and what results we expect. That is to say, we are already aware of the very nature of the interrogation or investigation we ourselves launch. Likewise, we can say that Dasein — the intended and posited object of investigation — is an entity with which we are somehow acquainted, howsoever impoverished our awareness of that acquaintance may be. We do have, that is to say, a minimal familiarity which suffices our launching the task of investigating the meaning of Being. Heidegger rightfully posits Dasein as the object of interrogation, not just because we are familiar with it, but also because "interrogation" or "questioning" itself is an essential aspect of this entity. Interestingly, prior to questioning the other modes of existence, Dasein questions itself or its own mode of existence. Heidegger describes this character of Dasein in the following way:

Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it — all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves.... This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "*Dasein*" (1978, pp. 26-27).

Thus interrogation is a characteristic which ontologically distinguishes Dasein from other entities. Its ontological priority lies in its intrinsic capacity to stand back and question its own meaning, i.e., existence. This means that Dasein understands itself. It relates itself to itself in the mode of self-understanding. Heidegger says: "*Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.* Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is 'ontological'" (1978, p. 32). However, Heidegger warns us against taking the ontological priority of Dasein as an end of the project. "Being-ontological", he says, "is not yet tantamount to developing an ontology" (1978, p. 32). Thus, he characterizes Dasein's "Being-ontological" as "pre-ontological" and then go on to investigate the issue.

In giving an existential-ontological sketch, Heidegger examines Dasein in its everydayness. What is crucial for Dasein is its existence. Dasein understands itself in terms of its existence — that is in terms of "to be or not to be". As Heidegger says, "its essence lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be" (1978, pp. 32-33). What is distinctive about its existence is that it at first understands itself in terms of the entities closest to it. And the closest of all things is the world Dasein dwells in. Dasein's relation with the world is not that of containment; rather, the world is an intrinsic feature of its existence. In no way is it possible for Dasein to understand itself without the world it finds itself in. Heidegger contends:

The kind of Being which belongs to Dasein is rather such that, in understanding its own Being, it has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is

essentially constant — in terms of the 'world' (1978, p. 36).

Dasein means being-in-the-world or being-there. To be there-in-the-world means to be disclosed in relation to the entities the world is composed of. Since "thereness" means disclosure and disclosure constitutes Dasein, "thereness" is actually definitive of Dasein. Richardson explains this phenomenon of "there", and also gives a reason for choosing this expression in the following way:

It is because the world is 'there' or disclosed to Dasein alone among entities, and because this disclosure is necessary for there to be any entity at all, that Heidegger has adopted the term "Dasein". This "there" that we essentially are, is also characterised as the 'clearing' [*Lichtung*] within which it first becomes possible for entities to be discovered (Richardson, 1986, p. 25).

Disclosure as being-there essentially has an interpretative mode. Dasein grasps other entities from particular standpoints. And this standpoint is utilitarian, that is to view things in terms of their usefulness. It is in this pragmatic relationship with the entities of the world that Dasein discloses itself. It confers meaning upon them in terms of their "serviciability" or "usability". Their usefulness is assessed within the "totality of significance". That is to say, an entity's usefulness or "for-the-sake-ofness" is relative to other entities in a larger whole. In this way, the world is a totality of references assigned by Dasein and only in relation to this totality it has its own understanding.

Dasein's pragmatic or concerned attitude towards the entities is limited to their manipulability. Heidegger describes

this as "ready-to-hand", i.e. entities at service for some desired purposes. In contrast to their readiness-to-hand (*zu handenheit*), Dasein can also relate itself to them in a theoretical manner. From the theoretical standpoint entities are viewed as they are irrespective of their circumspective concern. Heidegger describes such a phenomenon as "present-at-hand" (*vorhandenheit*) — what entities are in their real nature. We must note here that by introducing this distinction Heidegger is not proposing anything like the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena, i.e. entities in their appearance and what they are in reality. For Heidegger there is no reality beyond what we discover pragmatically and theoretically. There is nothing hidden behind the phenomenon which is never accessible. However, it is possible to grasp the constitution of entities independently of what they are useful for.

Prior to adopting any theoretical attitude towards the entities, Dasein understands them in their concernful way. And this is so because the phenomenon of "care" constitutes the basic existential framework of being-in-the-world. This phenomenon has several modes: of "being-alongside" (which means within the world); of presenting itself as "concern"; of "being-with" (to be with other Daseins) and of being understood as "solicitude". And when Dasein's own being is the issue it can be taken as "care". Since its existence is concernful existence, Dasein is very much fascinated by the world as it is understood in Dasein's circumspective dealings. It is because of this fact that Dasein

interprets entities in terms of their usefulness long before taking any theoretical interest in them. Heidegger writes:

Proximally, this Being-already-alongside is not just a fixed staring at something that is purely present-at-hand. Being-in-the-world, as concerns, is *fascinated* by the world with which it is concerned. If knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the true of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a *deficiency* in our having-to-do with the world concernfully. When concern holds back [*ichenhalten*] from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole remaining mode of Being-in, the mode of tarrying alongside.... [*das Nur-noch-verweilen bei*] (1978, p. 88).

The world — the circumspective world in terms of which Dasein understands itself and is fascinated by — is a socially and historically developed world. The world is not just a natural-physical world, but an interpreted world. In its mere physicality the world does not signify anything. Only when human beings confer significance or value upon it does it receive any meaningful character. In other words, things do not have meaning for themselves, but for the human Dasein. It is a socially and culturally developed world that actually conditions Dasein's understanding. Dasein finds itself in a world which is already there. It is this feature which is referred to by the prefix "Da" of "Sein" (Being). Dasein is a being-there-in-the-world. And by being-there, i.e., in dwelling in the world, Dasein discloses itself. Dasein's "thereness" signifies that Being discloses itself proximally and for the most part in terms of the world.

Dasein's understanding in the world gives it a historical character. We cannot understand the meaning of Being in an ahistorical manner. Dasein understands itself in terms of the

tradition handed down to it. This historical fact may remain hidden to itself. But along with this possibility, there are other possibilities too. Dasein can discover its tradition, preserve it, and also modify it. But what is inevitable is its essential historicity. Heidegger writes:

It *is* its past, whether explicitly or not. And this is so not only in that its past is, as it were, pushing itself along 'behind' it, and that Dasein possesses what is past as a property which is still present-at-hand and which sometimes has after-effects upon it: Dasein 'is' its past in the way of *its* own Being, which, to put it roughly, 'historicizes' out of its future on each occasion. Whatever the way of being it may have at the time, and thus with whatever understanding of Being it may possess, Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly. By this understanding, the possibilities of its Being are disclosed and regulated (1978, p. 41).

It is this Heideggerian conception of historical situatedness of Dasein which is taken by Gadamer as a very important notion — a notion which exerts tremendous influence on the problems Heidegger's predecessors were struggling with. Indeed, Gadamer's own critique of Dilthey finds its basis in the two fundamentally interdependent features of Heidegger's conceptual framework: the ontological reversal of "understanding", and Dasein's historical rootedness.

The idea that Dasein is disclosedness or is its own understanding cannot be grasped independently of the fact that its existence is historical. For Dasein understands itself only historically, i.e., in terms of the historically and culturally developed world. Since Dasein is historically rooted, its understanding is *ipso facto* historically delimited. Thus, in any

condition, Dasein cannot transcend its own historical background and thereby understand itself or anyone else. Taking this fact of historical consciousness as his fundamental point, Gadamer criticises Dilthey's conception of understanding human history as a great text which can be understood objectively. Gadamer's main contention is that human historical existence can only be understood from "within" the given history. There is no ahistorical or historically neutral platform from where one can look at it objectively.

Given the historical character of human existence, understanding is never free from presuppositions. Gadamer seeks to justify the role that prejudices and preconceived notions play in our understanding. The presuppositions are not the biases one accidentally associates oneself with and holds onto adamantly. Rather, they are partially constitutive of one's existence. One's socio-cultural background is responsible for the kind of prejudices one freights with and certainly one cannot fully transcend one's own past and history. Rather, one grows with it. It is this simple but important fact of human life which Gadamer wishes to bring to our attention. The purposes, beliefs, meanings etc. which a society lays down are the "things" which unconsciously mould our social behaviour.

The root of Gadamer's point is essentially Heideggerian. In Heidegger the meaning of existence is portrayed as it is understood in our ordinary day-to-day affairs. Our directedness towards the objects of the world is governed by the already assigned meanings. Such a fixedness actually illuminates the

historical character of understanding. Heidegger even claims that a pragmatic attitude is more fundamental than a theoretical enterprise. A theoretical scientific study is always a second-order inquiry, for what is theoretically studied is already understood instrumentally. Since the world is ontically the closest and Dasein understands itself primarily in such a context, Gadamer denies the possibility of bracketing out the prejudices and presuppositions which inevitably enter into one's understanding.

While Gadamer is fully sympathetic to Dilthey's programme of according an independent status to the human sciences, he is highly critical to Dilthey's conviction that the human-historical existence can be understood objectively, and that hermeneutics as a science of interpretation constitutes the methodology suitable to attain objective knowledge. We have already discussed how Dilthey extends the scope of hermeneutics, which is originally a discipline consisting of rules and norms for interpreting texts, to become the general methodology for the entire field of human studies. Obviously, such a programme smacks of scientism; but scientism, in the sense of objective knowledge, does not seem to be an appropriate approach to human historical reality. Human historical reality is not amenable to objective understanding paralleling the objective knowledge of natural reality. It is this scepticism about objective understanding of historical reality that constitutes the kernel of Gadamer's critique of Dilthey.

What provides the real basis of Gadamer's critique of the programme of the human sciences is Heidegger's analysis of Dasein.

For it is in the analysis of Dasein that Heidegger shows historicity to be an ontic feature of human existence. That human beings are historically situated beings is an ontological truth. And historical situatedness brings in its wake endless socio-cultural and traditional presuppositions and prejudices by which the human mind is perennially conditioned or influenced. Human history is cultural history, and the vicissitudes of cultural beliefs render human historical existence perpetually opaque to any objective understanding governed by a definite set of rules and norms. Besides, human self-understanding itself is no less bound to the vicissitudes of cultural history than the human events themselves. Consequently, there appears to be a serious mistake in conceiving of the human historical reality as a great text waiting to be interpreted by a set of well-defined hermeneutic rules or methods.

Does this mean that human historical situatedness renders human reality impervious to the light of truth and knowledge? Of course not. Gadamer conceives of historical situatedness in the positive sense of one's belonging to a tradition. This point is to be highlighted in that truth about human historical reality is essentially truth about the identity of the historical individual, and that it is only by belonging to a tradition that the individual acquires its own identity. Cultural belongingness is at the core of historical self-identity and self-image.

2.2 Understanding as projection of possibilities

Our discussion in this section will centre on the bearing that Heidegger's ontology has upon the theory of interpretation. We

shall probe, in this connection, the important connection between the concepts of "understanding" and "interpretation".

As has been noted in the preceding section, Heidegger's interpretation of "understanding" as disclosure does not guarantee the Cartesian clarity of perception. Disclosure or clearing [*Lichtung*], which is possible only in and through the world — the socially and culturally developed world — abolishes the subject-object dichotomy which is necessary to obtain Cartesian *distinctive knowledge*. Dasein's facticity or "thrownness" (in-the-world) constitutes the primordial ground for existence or understanding. This "grounding-in-the-world" is shown in all our day-to-day concerned manipulative activities. What underlies this pragmatic manipulative behaviour is our participation in the world in our own concerned ways. Thus, a possible disclosure of the world is, at the same time, a possible disclosure of our understanding. In other words, in disclosing the world we also disclose ourselves. And this leaves no room for the subject-object gap.

The possibility of several modes of Dasein's interpretative disclosure of the world implies that Dasein's being is essentially a "possible being". Its understanding is, what Heidegger calls, an *existential* — "Being as existing". To be-there (or, rather, being-there) means being-possible. Understanding is thus not a potentiality which can be skillfully actualized; rather, it is a potentiality realized in various possible modes. As Heidegger puts it:

Dasein is the possibility of Being-free for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. Its Being-possible is transparent to itself in different possible ways and degrees (1978, p. 183).

The category of possibility portrayed in the existential mode is not an empty logical possibility which can be underestimated in relation to actuality. "Possibility" understood as "not-yet-actual" points to possible directions beyond what is actual. And in this sense possibility is "more" than actuality. However, what we cannot overlook is the fact that Dasein's existence as "being-possible" is conditioned by the world that it is thrown in. Dasein is conditioned by its thrownness, i.e. by its finding itself in some definite state-of-mind or mood. Heidegger explains that the term "mood" here does not refer to any psychological state-of-mind; rather, it is an existential feature of Dasein's being. The definiteness of the state-of-mind curtails one's understanding. Heidegger maintains: "Possibility, as an *existential*, does not signify a free-floating potentially-for-Being in the sense of the 'liberty of indifference' (*libertas indifferentiae*). In every case Dasein, as essentially having a state-of-mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities" (1978, p. 183).

As curtailed by one's facticity, every new possible mode of being-in-the-world is only a modification of the earlier framework. If "thrownness" functions negatively in tempering with Dasein's freedom, it also functions in a positive way in so far as it constitutes the primordial ground for Dasein's disclosure or understanding. Our ordinary social existence, which constitutes the "they-self" and the inauthentic mode of existence, is what we

find ourselves closest to and thus it is in this mode that we mostly understand ourselves. The "theyness" of our existence, though constitutive of our inauthenticity, is the most primordial mode of realization of our Being. Thus, our "facticity", "thrownness", or "they-self" are the fundamental features of our existence and, in this sense, they always exercise their dominance. But, inspite of our being "assailed away" by the predominant "they-self", we have a potentiality to realize our ownmost possibility. This ownmost possibility, according to Heidegger, is the realization of one's own death — the authentic realization of one's own individuality, liberation from the inauthentic "they-self". Heidegger explains:

As such understanding it 'knows' *what* it is capable of—that is, what its potentiality-for-Being is capable of. This 'knowing' does not first arise from an immanent self-perception, but belongs to the Being of the "there", which is essentially understanding. And only *because* Dasein, in understanding, is its "there", *can* it go astray and fail to recognise itself. And insofar as understanding is *accompanied by* state-of-mind and as such is existentially surrendered to thrownness, Dasein has in every case already gone astray and failed to recognise itself. In its potentiality-for-being it is therefore delivered over to the possibility of first finding itself again in its possibilities (1978, p. 184).

What becomes clear from Heidegger's exegetical account of "understanding" is that the concepts of "thrownness" and "projection" constitute two essential dimensions of understanding. What is interesting is that "thrownness" and "projection" are not mutually contradictory but mutually supplementary. Together they bring to light the full meaning of the term "understanding". That is, they represent the two interpenetrating aspects of Dasein. "Thrownness" does impede possibilities, but in a limited sense of

the term; and, correspondingly, "projection" (*entwurf*) of possibility does not mean transcending one's facticity completely. In this sense, "thrownness" is not a threat to Dasein's "potentiality for possibilities", but constitutes an ontological feature of Dasein's understanding.

At this point, we need to discuss Heidegger's view on interpretation. The concept of "thrown-projection" is very important in grasping the relationship between "understanding" and "interpretation". According to Heidegger, interpretation is the development of understanding. But what does this development really mean? It does not mean, for Heidegger, that interpretation is one step cognitively higher than understanding. Rather, it means that interpretation is understanding made explicit or articulate. Prior to interpretation, understanding has the status of the projection of possibilities which remain implicit. It is this implicit order of possibilities which gets "worked out" by interpretation. Interpretation is therefore understanding made self-conscious; that is, interpretation renders understanding self-understanding.

It would follow from this that self-understanding is essentially interpretative. Understanding is the "unexpressed" implicit dimension which is tied to the "expressed", explicit dimension of an essentially two-dimensional structure of Dasein. Dasein's involvement in the world is its understanding the world of entities as of various utilitarian significance. But that the entities are disclosed to Dasein in this as-structure is not obvious. It is only in circumspective concern that Dasein

recognizes its involvement in a world of entities perceived as entities of this or that significance. The *implicit* mode of being as-understanding matures into the *explicit* interpretative mode. The latent "as-structure" or "as-character" of understanding is brought to the surface by interpretation. In point of fact, Dasein's encounter with the entities are disclosed in their as-structure. And the articulation of this mode of being involved with the world is what interpretation amounts to. Heidegger writes:

In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding (1978, pp. 188-89).

He further says:

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand. We do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has as involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by interpretation (1978, pp. 190-91).

Alongside the as-structure of understanding, Heidegger also talks about the "fore-structure" of understanding. The fore-structure of understanding is the fact that the things which are assigned meaning are already understood in some pre-reflective sense, i.e. at a level of implicit and inarticulate understanding. The as-structure of understanding does not imply that what is understood as something or other (as having this or that meaning) is, prior to its as-structural characterization, an entity

entirely unimbued with significance. Interpretation, which may be described as "as-structural understanding", is not a first-hand activity of attaching significance to some pure and bare stuff. Rather, the material interpreted is already structured by significance in virtue of what may be called pre-interpretative (or pre-reflective) understanding. For being-in-the-world is being-in-the-understood-world. Human existence is *ipso facto* "meaningful existence", for the human mode of Being is a mode of understanding. Hence, the human existential matrix is a signifying matrix. It is this original significance feature of human existence which may be described as "fore-structural" understanding. Thus, that which is as-structured by later interpretative understanding is already structured, or fore-structured, by pre-interpretative understanding. Hence there is a commonality between the two structural components of understanding, namely their "anticipatory character", or the fact that pre-interpretative, fore-structural understanding of human existence tacitly anticipates its interpretative, as-structural understanding.

This commonality is not to be mistaken as indicative of the unimportance of the distinction. Rather, it is by stressing this distinction that the essential relationship between the two can be illuminated. The nature of understanding is such that our interpretative grasp of particular things takes place within the "totality of things". And the "totality of things" constitutes the pre-understood or fore-structured background against which the as-structured understanding of particular things is realized by

the reflective, self-conscious act of interpretation. This fore-structured background is imbued with functional significance or utilitarian concern.

The phenomenon of the "totality of things" appears in *Being and Time* when Heidegger talks about comportment with the world through which Dasein understands itself. He says that the "equipmentality" of the objects is realized only in the larger context of "assignment" or "references". In other words, the meaning of one thing is understood in relation to the other things. So, the "totality-of-significance" which is a necessary condition of understanding something can now be seen as "fore-sightedness". In his commentary on Heidegger, Michael Gelven attempts to explain this phenomenon in the following way:

Interpretation, which is the awareness of the as-structure, does not occur unless something forces one to *become aware* of the as-structure (1970, p. 95).

What Gelven means here by "something" exerting its "force" is the awareness of the "totality-of-significations". The force is actually our familiarity with the world. In a sense it is our historical situatedness which gives meaning to everything — events, actions, beliefs, practices and so on. This is what the notion of "disclosedness" signifies. It is the everyday concernful world in terms of which Dasein grasps itself. As Heidegger puts it, "In every understanding of the world, existence is understood with it and *vice-versa*" (1978, p. 194). So it is the world — the circumspective concernful world — which constitutes the locus for Dasein's understanding of its own being. In other words, our interpretative understanding is grounded in the pre-conceived

day-to-day pragmatic understanding of the things of the world as well as our common interactive pattern with the people. This means that all understanding pertains to the whole of being-in-the-world. To understand things by first putting them in a larger context is to see them in terms of the part and whole relationship. And there is an inbuilt circularity; for parts make sense only when they are seen in the whole, but, the whole, at the same time, is constituted by the smaller parts.

This circular relationship between parts and whole, which is the fundamental principle of hermeneutics, is given an ontological formulation here. The circularity thus is not confined to textual readings but applies to the very nature of human existence. In a way, our historical situatedness is responsible for assigning the "anticipatory character" to understanding. And because of this intrinsic character we are able to "make sense" of things in advance, though they may have the status of mere guesses. The futural character of understanding, however, does not prevent us from scrutinising our own pre-conceived formulations. For example, in a textual reading we keep shifting back and forth between the anticipatory meanings and their scrutiny in terms of the whole text. This process prevents the circularity from becoming vicious. Not only does Heidegger deny the charge of the viciousness of the ontological circularity, but he also concedes, optimistically, that it is this circularity within which lies various possibilities of understanding our human-historical existence. On this he writes:

If the basic conditions which make interpretation possible are to be fulfilled, this must rather be done by

not failing to recognize beforehand the essential conditions under which it can be performed. What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential '*fore-structure*' of Dasein itself. It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing (Heidegger, 1978, pp. 194-95).

The ontological characterization of the "hermeneutic circularity" is taken as a significant point by the post-Heideggerian hermeneutical thinkers in order to bring to light the essential unity between the cognitive and the existential dimensions of understanding. What connects the two modes of understanding is the notion of "projection of possibilities". This anticipatory character of understanding is described in the post-Heidegger hermeneutic context in terms of the notion of "appropriation". The point that has now been made is that our understanding of our own existence is mediated by the already constituted world. Our understanding or self-understanding is an appropriation of (existential) possibilities emanating from the interpretation of hermeneutic objects. When it is said that it is only through interpretation that the existentiality of Dasein, i.e. "being-possible", can be grasped, it is implied that the cognitive act of interpretation is a necessary mediation through which the ontology of understanding is brought to the fore. In other words, Dasein's self-understanding, which means projecting possibilities on to the horizon of the future, is possible through the hermeneutic activity.

cultural expressions) functions as a mediator between man and human reality. In his recent article "Life in Quest of Narrative", Ricoeur elucidates various functions of the textual mediation which together constitute the essence of all hermeneutic experience. Ricoeur writes:

From a hermeneutical point of view, that is to say from the point of view of the interpretation of literary experience, a text has an entirely different meaning than the one recognised by structural analysis in its borrowing from linguistics. It is a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself; the mediation between man and the world is what we call *referentiality*; the mediation between men, *communicability*; the mediation between man and himself, *self-understanding* (1991, pp. 26-27).

Ricoeur's exposition of the concept of "mediation" brings to light the actual relation between our rootedness in the world (being-in-the-world) and the hermeneutic experience of this symbolically constituted reality. The point of "mediation" is one of the core themes of philosophical hermeneutics. On this point Carl Page writes:

The reason why contemporary philosophers have become so interested in talking about "hermeneutics" is that they have become profoundly dissatisfied with what on the realistic interpretation was the alleged *immediacy* of understanding, and so, in response, hermeneutic view of human understanding and reason characteristically stress the presence of some form of necessary *mediation* in the process of understanding (1991, p. 128).

In order to spell out this point, we need first to examine the concept of "thrown-projection", one of the central concepts of Heidegger's theory of understanding, upon which such a claim is built. This hyphenated phrase at once characterizes human existence with two seemingly opposite features: "thrownness",

which sets limits to human understanding, and "projection of possibilities", which means that human existence is more than what it actually is, i.e., it is progressive and limitless. These two features are not mutually contradictory; rather they signify the finitude of human understanding. While the "givenness" of the world (its prior existence) conditions human understanding, it is also constitutive of the background, against which all understanding is possible. Dasein understands itself only through the mediation of the world it is thrown in. The indispensability of the world for Dasein's understanding (disclosedness) implies that there is no direct intuitive perception of the pure self. Self-understanding is always an indirect, world-mediated understanding of oneself.

The idea of mediated self-understanding is set to oppose the Cartesian belief that the self can be grasped intuitively. With the denial of the intuitive perception of the self, it is also denied that the self is a *fixed* starting point or end point. What instead is argued for is that self-understanding is a continuous process of becoming oneself. And to "become oneself" is not to "discover oneself", but to engage in an endless process of knowing and developing one's own understanding. This is the sense in which all understanding is said to be self-understanding.

Heidegger's conception of "thrown-projection" captures this spirit of hermeneutics. In fact, it should be stressed that it is one of the several central Heideggerian notions which is responsible for bringing to light the philosophical traits of hermeneutics. The notion of "thrown-projection" does not have the

negative sense of a limitation. Although being-in-the-world is the basic state in which Dasein discloses itself, Dasein is being-possible in any condition. It is this primordial state which makes understanding possible.

These two features, namely, understanding as mediated by the world, and Dasein's potentiality for possible-being, together constitute the anti-Cartesian stance towards self-knowledge and self-understanding. Self-understanding is not a matter of pure introspective or inward spiritual engagement, but an endless reflective self-development through the self's engagement in the world.

2.3.1 The Post-Heideggerian Development

It would now be right to take up the post-Heideggerian development of hermeneutics as a theory of understanding. The crucial development that has taken place, especially in the works of Gadamer and Ricoeur, is that they stress the interlinkage of the ontology of understanding and the epistemology of interpretation within a wider framework of the human sciences. Their reflection on the hermeneutic activity reveal to them that all understanding is self-understanding. There is an enormous scope for reflecting upon one's historical situation in interpreting the cultural works and symbols constitutive of the situation. The ontological claim about understanding refers to the understanding of what human beings are. And it is now stressed, in the post-Heideggerian context, that our self-consciousness or historical consciousness is resultant upon our interpreting and reflecting upon the entire symbolic reality manifested in various cultural forms.

Self-understanding therefore is parasitic upon our first-order understanding of the meaning-constituted manifold of lived-reality or life-world. Elucidating this vital point of contemporary hermeneutic philosophy Bernstein writes:

We are "thrown" into the world as being who understand and interpret — so if we are to understand what it is to be human beings, we must seek to understand understanding itself, in its rich, full and complex dimensions (1983, p. 113).

The ontological reversal of understanding (i.e. understanding is not a mere epistemological activity, but also a mode of existence) brings about significant changes in what is called a "hermeneutic situation". What it brings to light is that a hermeneutic situation is a situation where the traditionally held subject-object distinction collapses. The dichotomy is now replaced by the notion "affinity". It has been argued that beyond the psychological and physical realms there is something deeper which underlies the harmony between the subject and the object. And this harmony is, according to Gadamer, in their historical nature. He explains:

The common relationship which the understandable and the understood share, this sort of "affinity" which ties them together, is not formed on the equivalence of their modes of being, but on what that mode of being *is*. This means that neither the knowable nor the known are "ontic" and simply "subsistent", but that they are "historical", that is to say, their mode of being is historicity (Gadamer, 1979, p. 132).

Gadamer even goes further to say that there is nothing like a historical object. The concept of a historical object blocks our vision from seeing the unity between the knower and the known, for it still holds that the historical object, whatever it may be, is

a *thing* to be understood. Gadamer insists that what he means by "historical" is the unity of "mine" and the "other". A hermeneutic object, for him, is just like another person. In his words:

Not only the concept, but even the expression "historical object" seems useless to me. What we mean to designate by this phrase is not an "object" at all, but a "unity" of "mine" and "other".... It is more true to state that the historical object, in the authentic sense of that term, is not an "object" but the "unity" of one with the other. It is this relationship, that is, "affinity", through which they both manifest themselves: the historical reality on the one hand and the reality of historical understanding on the other. It is this "unity" which is primordial historicity where knowledge and the historical object manifest themselves in their "affiliation". An object which comes to us through history is not only an object which one discerns from afar, but is the "center" in which historically operative being and historically operative consciousness appear (Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p. 159).

The fundamental claim that Gadamer makes is that the nature of our understanding is historical and the realization of this fact is the realization of the unity between the historical reality and our understanding of it. So, in historical consciousness both the knowledge and the known show themselves in their intimacy. It is this unity of understanding and the object understood that has been highlighted.

The co-presence of the knowledge and the known in understanding suggests that the object of understanding (and here it is historical reality) is not a detached, manipulable object. The aim of understanding is not to exert one's dominance over the object but to make oneself dependent on the claims made by the object itself. The hermeneutic subject is not a mere understander or interpreter. He also understands himself in the sense that he enhances his self-understanding in the light of the object

interpreted. So, the deeper claim here is that our self-understanding is not separable from the understanding of the historical reality which finds its expression in a variety of forms. In Gadamer's words: "historical consciousness is a mode of self-consciousness" (1979, p. 121).

This ontological claim about understanding is made explicit in Gadamer's use of the term "belongingness" or "cultural belongingness". Belongingness is even more profound a notion than the notion of "affinity"; for it reveals the essential (non-contingent) nature of human-historical reality. Since the symbolically signified historical reality is constitutive of what we are, we understand ourselves only by way of interpreting the symbolic character of the world.

The point that understanding essentially is self-understanding can be driven home by elucidating the concept of "application". And the concept of "application" as conceived by Gadamer sets the background against which the cognate concept of "appropriation", due to Ricoeur, can be expounded.

2.3.2 The Concept of Application

According to Gadamer, "application" (*subtilitas applicandi*) is an inextricable element of all hermeneutic activities. On this he differs from his predecessors who separates "application" from the other two elements of hermeneutics, namely, understanding (*subtilitas intelligendi*) and interpretation (*subtilitas explicandi*). By putting stress on the notion of application, Gadamer brings to light the philosophical character of

hermeneutics. The element of application builds a connection between hermeneutics and *praxis*. It says that hermeneutics is a practical discourse; it concerns the practical issue of understanding human-historical reality.

Gadamer connects the concept of "application" to Aristotle's idea of *phronesis* or practical-moral reasoning. Understanding as practical reasoning differs both from technical know-how (*techne*) and theoretical knowledge (*episteme*). Understanding is not a matter of possessing technical skill or theoretical sophistication. Rather, it is concerned with acting and taking decisions in practical situations. One can act in accordance with the socially defined moral norms, but the important point is that one has to take a decision whether to comply with the rules and norms or not. A universal or general norm demands an application in a given situation and in whatever way a person responds to the situation, he is held to be responsible for his actions and decisions. In being a moral agent, a person owns responsibility for what he does towards others and towards himself. Thus, as a moral agent a person understands himself in and through concrete practical situations.

If practical reasoning defines what application is, then every hermeneutic situation is an instance of the understanding subject's practical involvement in the situation understood. An interpreter is not a passive onlooker of the things but finds himself involved in a practical situation. He understands or reflects upon his actions. In a hermeneutic situation of textual reading, for example, the reader reflects upon his own

pre-conceived notions in the light of the claims made and questions raised by the text itself and thereby enhances the horizon of his own understanding.

What follows from the elucidation of the concept of "application" is the notion of "involvement" which is vital to any hermeneutic event. The essential point about all understanding is that something foreign or alien is overcome or made one's own. The principle of "making one's own what is alien" does refer to the usual meaning of "understanding" as comprehension. When we say someone has understood something we mean to say that he is able to reproduce it. However, the principle goes beyond the usual connotation of the term. The overcoming of "what is alien" does not mean having a full control over it, but grasping or assimilating it into one's own horizon.

One can make one's own what is alien only when one understands the thing under question from his particular standpoint. A hermeneutic object, whatever it may be, does not yield any meaning on its own. Its meaning is realized only in a particular interpretative context. Gadamer describes this feature as "a process of coming into the being of meaning" (1975, p. 146). And he calls this the concretization of meaning, which takes place in an interpretative situation, a happening, an event. A hermeneutic event is not like a physical occurrence which requires an independent causal explanation for its intelligibility; rather, it is dependent on the interactive interpretative setting for its meaning. A hermeneutic activity is not a detached passive

inquiry but an active involvement in the situation understood. In Gadamer's words:

Seen from the point of view of the interpreter, 'event' means that he does not, as a knower, seek his object, 'discovering' by methodological means what was meant and what the situation actually was, if slightly hindered and affected by his own prejudices. This is only an external aspect of the actual hermeneutic event.... But the actual event is made possible only because the word that has come down to us as tradition and to which we are to listen really encounters us and does so in such a way that it addresses us and is concerned with us (1975, p. 419).

Gadamer explains the concept of "application" by specific reference to legal hermeneutics — that of a legal historian and of a practicing judge. (Here, we are not taking into account the theological hermeneutics where also the element of application figures prominently). The important point which Gadamer wishes to make about these two aspects of legal hermeneutics is that they show dependence on interpretative understanding. Although a legal historian is mainly interested in a historical survey of "laws", he cannot avoid interpreting them. For, besides maintaining an intelligible chronological order, he needs to show their development in various epochs. And this process certainly involves interpretation despite the historian's reliance on historical records. Similar is the case with a legal practitioner. Although "laws" existing in the judicial system of a society possess explanatory power, their enactment in different situations requires an unbiased understanding of those situations. Such a "situational understanding" does not merely have a practical importance of treating the persons concerned with fairness, but is constitutive of the understanding of the meaning of legal rules

necessarily involved in the understanding of the normative functions of those rules. Hence the application of norms or rules in different situations entails interpretation of them with respect to the situations concerned.

However, every hermeneutic situation is not like a legal situation with fixed laws waiting to be interpreted when required. There may be other, more open-ended, situations with no explicit rules or norms for interpretation to latch onto. Hence, in such contexts, "application" cannot be a matter of the interpretation of norms or rules in relation to a given situation. And from this it should be obvious that Gadamer does not intend to project hermeneutics as a methodological programme. When he regards "application" as an integral element of hermeneutics, he does not thereby intend to lay down any methods of applying rules in different circumstances. What is instead suggested is that every hermeneutic situation is a unique phenomenon and thus demands to be interpreted in its own way. That is to say, it is only in a particular interpretative instance that the unique meaning of a hermeneutic situation finds its actualization. Meaning is not a fixed content somehow contained in the situation independently of, or prior to, any interpretation. Rather, meaning is actualized in the interpretative act. And each interpretative instance thus brings in its wake something new about the interpreted situation or object, whether it is a text, a work of art, or just about anything. Gadamer explains:

A law is not there to be understood historically, but to be made concretely valid through being interpreted. Similarly, a religious proclamation is not there to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be

taken in a way in which it exercises its saying effect. This includes the fact that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly, i.e. according to the claims it makes, must be understood at every moment in every practical situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application (1975, p. 275).

The idea of the concretization of meaning through an interpretative act brings to light certain significant features of hermeneutic philosophy. First of all, it gives rise to the idea of the "plurality of meaning". Since all hermeneutic objects depend upon various interpretative contexts for their meaning, there can be as many interpretations of them as there are interpreters. The diversity of meaning implies that there is no fixed and unequivocal meaning of the object. Another feature which is closely linked to the earlier point is that since understanding, in each case, is an individual's understanding, the meaning which results from any individual interpretation becomes "his own". An interpreter has the sole authority over his meaning because he alone is the participant in the process of understanding. By the same token, he is the bearer of all that takes place in an interpretative encounter.

If involvement means looking at things from one's present context, then every hermeneutic event is a new event, a new experience. But a new experience does not let the already existing frame of things remain unchanged. Every hermeneutic instance is rather an adjustment of one's beliefs and opinions. In this sense, all understanding is inward-directed, that is understanding oneself or one's own being. This fusion of understanding and being connects itself to the notion of "becoming". What is suggested by the notion of "becoming" is that understanding is

never complete and exhaustive at any point of time. It is a perpetual inquiry about oneself in and through socio-cultural interaction. The idea of continuous self-growth defies the possibility of any ahistorical objective grid from which any human-historical reality can be explained. (We shall be able to see the significance of this feature under the title "appropriation" later.)

The limitless character of understanding is, however, indicative of the essential incompleteness of the understanding of one's own being. As has been noted earlier in the case of Heidegger's concept of "thrown-projection", the "projection of possibilities", i.e., the becoming-character of understanding, is always accompanied by the negative force of curtailment, in the sense of one's "thrownness". One can never stand over against one's situation and thereby objectively study it. Since we can never exorcise our prejudices completely, our knowledge of ourselves can never attain the ideal of perfectibility. It is this idea of historical situatedness which questions the Cartesian ideal of complete methodical control for attaining absolute self-transparency.

Nonetheless, the "becoming-character" of hermeneutic understanding gives us the satisfaction of endless self-exploration, if not the assurance of complete self-transparency. Gadamer never laments over the imperfectability of human understanding. Instead he considers it to be an essential features of our facticity, our historical situatedness. He writes:

The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We are always within the situation, and to throw light on it is a task that is never entirely completed. This is true also of the hermeneutic situation, i.e. the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand. The illumination of the situation — effective-historical reflection — can never be completely achieved, but this is not due to a lack in the reflection, but lies in the essence of the historical being which is ours. To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete (1975, p. 269).

The admission of the unattainability of perfection and of absolute control does not diminish the importance of the notion of "thrown-projection" which equips us with critical insight. Gadamer discerns some insightful aspects in the notion of "thrownness" and takes advantage of them in developing his own theory of understanding. To be thrown into the world is, of course, inevitably to take a certain kind of root in the way the world is, namely the prevailing historical contingencies. The individual human being has no choice but to be inducted into the already prevalent historical order. In other words, there is a tradition in which the individual takes its root as it is thrown in, and the tradition plays the role of some kind of "authority". So the individual is never allowed to be so objectively situated as to stand above tradition and authority altogether and examine it from some transcendental vantage point. Rather, all understanding grows from within the historically conditioned cultural environment. And its reflective understanding of its own history is also not privileged by an ahistorical mode of understanding. Indeed, there is no possibility of a transcendental theory of understanding that revolves on the fulcrum of pure rationality of the kind conceived

(rather misconceived) by the Enlightenment ideal of knowledge. Consciousness is intrinsically historical consciousness.

The projective character of Dasein is exploited by Gadamer to develop the idea of projective understanding. What is implied in this notion of understanding is the finitude of human existence. Though the individual's existence is conceived as a ceaseless march towards the realization of one's potentialities, it is also inevitably halted by the arrival of death. Death, or rather the realization of potentialities, constitutes human finitude. And the finitude of human existence in turn warns the essential incompleteness of understanding. Self-understanding is therefore destined to end in incompleteness.

For Gadamer, understanding is always future-oriented, projective; but there is nothing like the final realization of authenticity. He rather partakes of the humanistic tradition's belief that understanding is a ceaseless process of *bildung*, i.e., self-formation. In analyzing the past (which one always does in relation to the present), in confronting alien cultures, in getting into dialogues with others, and in interpreting cultural objects, one gets an opportunity to enhance one's horizon of understanding.

2.3.3 Ricoeur on the concept of "Appropriation"

The idea of becoming, which gives existential significance to understanding, finds its subtler expression in Ricoeur's concept of "appropriation". Without going against the customary meaning of appropriation (namely, to appropriate is to understand the meaning

of what is being said or written), Ricoeur interprets it as *Aneinung* which means "to make one's own what was alien". What is appropriated, or made one's own, is the meaning present in the object. Following the Husserlian conception of the "ideality of meaning", Ricoeur says that meaning should not be confused with either mental or physical reality. Since meaning is not mental representation, understanding is by no means an imaginative reproduction of the other person's mind. Textual understanding, for example, is not an attempt to know the author's mental life but to understand what is presented "in front of the text", to use Ricoeur's phrase. This does not mean that the author receives no place at all in the reading of his text. Instead, Ricoeur contends that the "fixity of meaning" works as a mediator between the writer and the reader. However, this mediation does not have any role beyond facilitating the understanding of the text. Ricoeur writes:

The objectification of meaning is a necessary mediation between the writer and the reader. But as mediation, it calls for a complementary act of a more existential character which I shall call the appropriation of meaning (1981, p. 198).

He further writes:

The interpretation is complete when the reading releases something like an event, an event of discourse, an event in the present time. As appropriation, the interpretation becomes an event: the counterpart of the timeless distanciation implied by any literary or textual criticism of an anti-historicist character (1981, p. 185).

What follows from the above-cited passages is that there is something more to appropriation than its function of overcoming or "making one's own what is alien". This something "more" is its

existential character which may remain hidden behind its naive characterization. In dealing with something alien, understanding progresses dialectically between "alienation" and "home-coming", i.e., self-understanding. In overcoming or appropriating what is alien, the interpreter also gets distanced from his own narrow historical horizon. But the alienation or distancing is not absolute, for one can never fully transcend one's horizon. Rather, it is to be understood in the mild sense of giving respect, or the benefit of the doubt, to the other person's views in one's own framework. If we concentrate on the point that understanding is possible in and through participation, alienation seems to be obligatory on the part of the interpreters. For a dialogue, and hence understanding, cannot take place in the want of genuine participation. But more than an obligation, alienation or distancing constitutes an essential condition of a hermeneutic process.

The concept of alienation is considered to be very significant in hermeneutic philosophy in that it explains what is "truth" in this context. The notion of truth is a key theme of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. Gadamer's attempt to demonstrate the presence of truth in the human sciences is an onslaught to the scientific monopoly over truth. However, truth as "correspondence with reality" is not what is meant when he argues for the equal ascertainability of truth in the human world.

Gadamer's account of "truth" is grafted on to Heidegger's notion of truth as "disclosure" or "unconcealment". Truth, in Heidegger, is a phenomenological concept. It does not refer to the

classical sense of "representation" where it means the true representation of reality. By "disclosure" Heidegger does not mean judgemental or discourse-like reality, but intends to signify a phenomenon of "happening". The happening of truth does not imply the occurrence of a physical or mental event but an existential moment. Its existential meaning is nothing but the disclosure of various possible ways of existing. It is in terms of this idea of truth as disclosure that Gadamer explains what truth is in the human-historical sciences. He claims that an art-work, for example, has its own Being, i.e., it makes its own truth-claim. The mode of being of a work of art is its transformative power. Gadamer explains: "the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience, changing the person experiencing it" (1975, p. 90). However, what underlies the event of transformation is the dialectic of alienation and return or home-coming.

Gadamer takes recourse to the notion of "play" to explain this point. A play has its own being and the being of a play depends upon the players. That is to say, a play comes into being only when the players get involved and absorbed in it. Analogously, a work of art is allowed to make a truth-claim about itself only when there is a serious participation on the part of the interpreters. A claim to truth in this context does not have to do anything with corroboration. Its actual "transformative force" can only be seen in relation with the interpreters. An

art-work, for instance, asserts its own being, i.e., changes the experiencer, only in and through the interactive process.

Besides the participation of players, a play has another important dimension, namely its referentiality. What a play represents need not be a true portrayal of reality, but it must convey something that is truly significant to someone's real life. More importantly, a play "represents something for someone". It represents a situation or event which may not be actual but which has actual significance for the people. It is because of this referential dimension that a play, or a work of art, has its meaningful place in our lives. And this is why we look at cultural objects with great respect. They are not mere objects of aesthetic pleasure, but they enter into the very fabric of our cultural existence. Explaining how cultural objects represent the spirit of communal life and bind the whole community in a meaningful way, Gadamer writes:

A procession as part of a religious rite is more than a demonstration, since its real meaning is to embrace the whole religious community. And yet the religious act is a genuine representation for the community and equally a theatrical drama is a playful act that, of its nature, calls for an audience. The representation of a god in a religious rite, the representation of a myth in a play, are play not only in the sense that the participating players are wholly absorbed in the representative play and find in their heightened self-representation, but also in that the players represent a meaningful whole for an audience (1975, p. 98).

The heightened and rich representation of reality in numerous cultural symbolic forms equips us with tremendous self-transformative power. An interpreter might undergo a sudden transformation in a hermeneutic encounter. He may feel the

annihilation of the earlier narcissistic ego and enjoy the freedom of venturing into new, exotic worlds. It is this sense of disclosure or transformative power that Gadamer's account of truth is suggestive of.

By endorsing Gadamer's view, Ricoeur explains the transformative capacity of hermeneutic objects in the following manner:

The player is metamorphosed 'in the true'; in playful representation, 'what is emerges'. But 'what is' is no longer what we call everyday reality; or rather, reality truly becomes reality, that is, something which comprises a future horizon of undecided possibilities, something to fear or to hope for, something unsettled (1981, p. 187).

Keeping in mind Gadamer's analogy of play, Ricoeur recognizes several aspects of the notion of "playful transformation". Firstly, the "world" represented in a text, or in a work of art, is itself a metamorphosed world. For it is a construct of the author's creative imagination. It is for this reason that, for Ricoeur, a text, by virtue of its being a "work" of its author, possesses its own world and requires to be interpreted. Secondly, the author of a text, or the producer of a play, or an actor on the stage, undergoes a change. For instance, in the presentation of the work, the author discloses his identity through some character. He never disappears from the scene but, at the same time, he never reveals himself completely and directly. He also experiences "playful changes" in his relationship with the presentation of the world of the text. The third element in a playful dialectic is the reader. Many a time it so happens that the reader begins to identify himself with some character

portrayed in a novel. Ricoeur claims that this is true not just in the case of fiction and drama presented on the stage, but even in the case of philosophical texts. He maintains that "even when we read a philosophical work, it is always a question of entering into an alien work, of divesting oneself of the earlier 'me' in order to receive, as in play, the self conferred by the work itself" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 190).

It is at this juncture that we can perceive the existential-ontological import of hermeneutic understanding. The idea of "appropriation" or self-renewal through the alienating moment of self-denial illuminates this existential feature. This essential "inward movement" of understanding is a thorough denial of the Romantic conception of understanding as "imaginative reconstruction" of the other mind. Instead of looking into the mind of the other person, understanding now points to a self-referring process. Every hermeneutic instance essentially "points back" to one's own subjectivity. In other words, reflexivity is an essential feature of hermeneutics. We can sum this discussion by quoting Ricoeur approvingly:

Far from saying that a subject, who already masters his own being-in-the-world, projects the *a priori* of his own understanding and interpolates the *a priori* in the text, I shall say that appropriation is the process by which the revelation of new modes of being — or, if you prefer Wittgenstein to Heidegger, new 'forms of life' — gives the subject new capacities for knowing himself. If the reference of a text is the projection of a world, then it is not in the first instance the reader who projects himself. The reader is rather broadened in his capacity to project himself by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself (1981, p. 192).

What comes to the fore from the above discussion is that interpretation is required because our own existence is symbolically constituted. It is only in interpreting the symbolically constituted world that we understand ourselves. And the cultural objects that enter into the fabric of our life possess "truth" in the sense that they open up the various "ways" in which the human-historical reality can be grasped. That is to say, our self-understanding is illuminated by the symbolic disclosure of realms of possibilities each of which is an alternative mode of existence for us.

CHAPTER III

EPISTEMOLOGY AS A ROUTE TO ONTOLOGY

We have seen in the previous chapter how the idea of "appropriation" brings to light the "critical and reflective" dimension of hermeneutics. It is critical and reflective because of the inner dialectic of "alienation and appropriation". The dialectic is such that while the reader or the appreciator appropriates meaning, he is also questioned for holding unscrutinised presumptions. He is being questioned in a hermeneutic context because the object itself cancels out his dogmatic beliefs and conceptions and even throws light on the things which he (the hermeneutic subject) himself has not anticipated. In this sense, a hermeneutic reading of, say, a text is critical. A reader is able to critically deal with his own anticipated possibilities in the light of the claims made by the text itself. A hermeneutic reading is also reflective because it relates the reader to himself. It alienates or distanciates him from his own "world" only to reveal to him a deeper meaning of human-historical existence. A distanciation is, in effect, a home-coming with an enlarged vision of human reality. In this sense, a hermeneutic cognitive enterprise has an existential character.

The recognition of this dialectic as constitutive of a hermeneutic practice makes a significant change in the prevailing conceptions of interpretative activities. Understanding is not reconstructive in the sense of an imaginative duplication of the psyche of the other person. Nor does it claim to give a final interpretation in any hermeneutic case. The dialectic brings the

subject and the object into a situation of mutual confrontation. Just as a hermeneutic subject is not a passive onlooker of the things, so also a hermeneutic object is not an entity for mere manipulation. Very importantly, the dialectic emphasises the meaning-suffused, intentional character of the hermeneutic object which has its own claims to make towards the subject, whereby the subject may be existentially transformed.

What emerges as a crucial point here is that the cognitive enterprise of interpretation has an essential bearing upon understanding as an existential-ontological mode. This connection between the epistemological and the ontological dimensions has been emphasised by Ricoeur. Ricoeur's point is that an ontology of understanding is inseparable from an epistemology of interpretation. For human existential reality is, according to him, symbolically constituted and is thus intrinsically an object of a hermeneutic epistemic approach. Thus, although it is to be realized as a primordial truth that our being human consists in our understanding of ourselves, in our self-interpretations, yet this primordial ontological status of understanding in our existential self-constitution can be recognized only through the operation of understanding in the historical process, that is understanding as a method of historical knowledge. And the human reality of historical knowledge being structured by various cultural symbols, our understanding of ourselves is possible only through our interpretation of the various cultural symbols that weave the fabric of our lived-reality.

It is this idea of symbolically mediated understanding that characterizes Ricoeur's "long route" to ontology in contrast to Heidegger's "short and direct" route to ontology.¹ Ricoeur's hermeneutics thus illustrates an important difference between his existential phenomenology and that of Heidegger. This important difference can be articulated against the background of Husserl. For it is Husserlian phenomenology that constitutes the starting point as well as the point of departure for these two thinkers. Hence it is necessary first to explore the relationship between ontology and phenomenology. And since hermeneutics is related to phenomenology in a special way, it also becomes necessary to see the relation among the three domains, namely, ontology, phenomenology and hermeneutics. This relationship will be discussed with reference to Heidegger and Ricoeur. It is hoped that apart from enabling us to appreciate the difference between Heidegger and Ricoeur, the overall discussion will also pave the way to propose a new theory of self-understanding.

3.1 Ontology and Phenomenology

Heidegger's early phase of thinking, which culminates in the publication of *Being and Time*, is heavily influenced by the ideological climate of Germany that had prevailed during the periods preceding and succeeding the first world war. The doctrine that was vulnerable to utmost criticism in the wake of

¹Besides describing his own thesis as "long route" to ontology, Ricoeur characterizes Heidegger's "analytic of Dasein" as a "short route" to ontology. Heidegger's manner of theorizing about the ontology of understanding is short and direct because he intends to define the primordial essence of Dasein without passing through any intermediary phases. See *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1974, p. 6).

new ideas and approaches geared to a reconstruction of Germany was "German Idealism". Idealistic and metaphysical approaches to the understanding of human reality were rejected and replaced by the historical approach — that is the idea that human understanding is essentially finite, and there is no ahistorical, abiding, incontrovertible truth about it.

Against the backdrop of the historicity of understanding and the consequent displacement of metaphysics, Heidegger raises the issue of *Seinvergessenheit* (the forgetfulness of Being) for the first time in *Being and Time*. The issue demands a reappraisal of the meaning of Being from the vantage point of the historicity of human existence. What is forgotten in the analysis of Being in the entire western intellectual tradition is the historical dimension of existence or the finitude of all human understanding. Therefore what needs consideration, according to Heidegger, is the ephemeral, contingent, transient character of human existence.

The restoration of the historicity of understanding against any metaphysical view of human reality constitutes a point of contact between the critical theorists of history and Heidegger. The central theme of historians like Windelband and Rickert is that truth has a historical or epochal nature. The truth is the truth of the world-view upheld in a particular historical period. However, Heidegger distanciates himself from the critical theorists and raises a deeper question of the meaning of historical understanding. The foundational issue for him is how historical beings appropriate the authentic meaning of their own historicity. Heidegger discerns that the critical theorists of

history, despite their drawing attention to the fact of our historical situatedness, believe that the historical meaning is constituted in consciousness and is not a product of history itself. Thus, the norms and values that a historian employs in grasping the meaning of historical reality remain undisturbed from historical variations. Thus, in taking consciousness as a transcendental source for historical thinking, they set aside the important issue of the *lebensphilosophie*. Heidegger is similarly critical of Dilthey. What he finds objectionable is Dilthey's conception of history as a coherent order. It is, as it were, a complete text structured around a definite world-view. In this conception of history as the formation of "world-views", history is deemed to be an object — a record of past events and episodes. It is then amenable to scientific treatment for a historian who remains a mere observer, situated outside the actual contingency of events. Heidegger finds that both the critical theorists of history and his predecessor Dilthey ultimately attempt to procure objective results in the historical sciences and thereby fail to raise the basic issue of the meaning of historicity.

In his own existential-phenomenological investigation, Heidegger's primary task is to understand the phenomenon of "everydayness" which he takes to be an inauthentic mode of existence. "Existence", "facticity" and "fallenness" are the key features which finally emerge in his analysis. What is essential in his investigation is the consideration of both authentic and inauthentic aspects of these three features. This three-dimensional nature of historical existence is in turn

explained by Heidegger in terms of the ekstatic character of temporality. There is a deeper affinity between each of these three aspects of historicity and a definite temporal mode. While existence is primarily oriented towards the future, facticity and fallenness are oriented towards the past and the present respectively. It is in terms of this temporalization of Dasein's historicity that Heidegger intends to explore the meaning of Dasein's being.

Heidegger's historical ontology or the ontology of finitude suggests that Dasein understands its historicity or finitude only in the most authentic moment of anticipating its own death. So, what is authentic about the future orientation is the anticipation of one's death, which reveals the contingent character of existence, rather than drifting away with the flow of time. The authenticity of the past lies in anticipating possibilities rather than in a heedless participation in the network of the cumulative experiences of the inherited tradition. Similarly, what characterizes the authentic moment of the present is critical evaluation of our everydayness, that is our participation in the socially defined modes of activities. The inauthenticity of existence comes to the fore in the authentic realization of our own existence. Thus, the meaning of historicity is the disclosure of the inauthentic and authentic sides of human existence. The meaning of Dasein's being however does not answer the fundamental issue of the meaning of Being. It only guides the way the fundamental ontological question can be approached.

Besides his own contemporary intellectual atmosphere, there are two other major influential sources that guide Heidegger's ontological inquiry. They are: Brentano's thesis "On the Manifold Meaning of Being: According to Aristotle" and Carl Braig's manual "On Being: An Outline of Ontology". But, most importantly, Heidegger's initial years of phenomenological apprenticeship with his master Husserl initially nurture his thoughts and also constitute a point of departure for him. Heidegger himself acknowledges his training period under Husserl as a platform for dealing with the more profound questions. The Husserlian distinction between the sensuous and the categorial intuitions reveals to him the multiple senses of Being.

By raising the ontological question Heidegger takes up a position which is essentially contrasted with that of Husserl. For this ontological issue does not find a place within the scope of Husserlian phenomenology. However, this ontological question is related to phenomenology in a special way. This special sense, which phenomenology acquires in relation to ontology, is that of a method — a distinctive method suitable to carry out an ontological investigation. Heidegger clearly says that "*Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible*" (1978, p. 60). However, in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, very little is said about the nature of the phenomenological method. All that is discussed is the nature of a phenomenological description. A phenomenological description is defined as that which lets the entities show themselves as they are.

The absence of a clear methodological strategy is, however, not a lacuna in Heidegger's programme. For phenomenology even as a method has a very different meaning for him. What is commonly understood by a well-defined methodology is that certain rules and techniques are defined so as to be applied to a specified field. In this sense phenomenology lacks a definite set of methodological rules and norms. However, phenomenology, for Heidegger, has a very different methodological connotation. It differs from other methods in the sense that it deals with the "how" question as opposed to the "what" question. A phenomenological question is not about what the (definition of the) object is, but about how the entities uncover themselves.²

In his view, a research should not be governed by a definite set of methodological norms. For the true task of a researcher is to eliminate all that which blocks the vigourousness of questioning. Phenomenology, for him, displays this radicalness. However, though Being is what a phenomenological description aims at, there always lurks the possibility that what is discovered may get covered up again. In other words, a phenomenological endeavour only uncovers the entities but does not prevent them from being disguised again. Since a phenomenological enterprise shuttles

²Heidegger does not differ from Husserl on this point that phenomenological method means disclosure of entities as they show themselves in themselves. Although the Husserlian methodological principle is acceptable to him, he understands the notion of "encountering" in a different sense. Here, he contrasts "phenomena" with something whose meaning is concealed. Thus, phenomenology, for him, is a requirement for revealing the meanings of things "yet not shown". It is not "any exhibiting of entities as they show themselves in themselves" (Heidegger, P. 35).

between closure and disclosure, concealment and unconcealment, there is never an undeflectable phenomenological description. Phenomenology is therefore a constant critical research towards *zu sache* (to the things themselves).

In so far as Heidegger retains the vocabulary of *zu sache*, he maintains closeness to his master Husserl. But this affinity between the two holds only with regard to the methodological concern of phenomenology. For Husserl, phenomenology is not only a method, a rigorous science of phenomena, but is also a full-fledged theory. In contrast, Heidegger does not specify any methodological rules and techniques, even though the methodological status of phenomenology is explicitly recognized. These differences indicate that there is only a very thin line which conjoins Heidegger with Husserl.

One striking dissonance between Husserl and Heidegger over phenomenology can be discerned with respect to the mode of perception. The difference will become clear if we examine the notion of intentionality as portrayed differently by Husserl and Heidegger.

In Husserlian terminology, intentionality refers to *cogito cogitatum*, which says that consciousness is always consciousness of objects. Phenomenology, according to him, is a study of phenomena as they appear "in themselves". And reflection, or looking inward into one's consciousness, constitutes a method. Since pureness of perception is what phenomenology aims at, it rules out all natural associations or preconceived ideas. In thus

capturing one's consciousness, phenomenological reflection is purged of all external natural influences. As Gorner puts it:

Natural reflection takes place within the natural attitude, the implicit affirmation of the real existence of the world. The subject of such natural reflection understands himself to be a psycho-physical entity in the world. In phenomenological reflection, by contrast, the general thesis of the natural attitude, together with all the particular positings of the real existence based on the general thesis, have been suspended, put out of action (which is not the same as negated or even doubted) (1992, p. 46).

However, in phenomenological reduction (bracketing of the natural attitudes etc.) consciousness does not become objectless or worldless. Rather, what remain in it are pure phenomena. Thus, this is what Husserl means by "transcendental" as opposed to "mundane" world. He further talks about eidetic perception which is a result of eidetic reduction. In this second kind of reduction the object loses its individual distinctness and what is shown is its "essence" or "generic" features.

In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger understands intentionality as the primal feature of human existence. Intentionality, for him, is not a mode of perception in consciousness, but a way of being-in-the-world. Intentionality is rooted in being-in-the-world which makes our comportment with the entities of the world and our interaction with our fellow beings possible.

This existential-ontological character of intentionality is explicable in terms of "ontological freedom". McNicholls (1991) explains that freedom for Heidegger is not a quality possessed by a particular entity called Dasein; rather, it is located in the

being-in-the-world. It is the world — the hermeneutic world — which monitors Dasein's perception of or comportment with the entities. Thus, what is brought to light is that the world constitutes a necessary mediation for Dasein's freedom "to be".

Given this meaning of intentionality, it falsifies the idea of the primacy of the cognitive subject and its capacity to perceive things within an isolated individual horizon. Heidegger's main complaint against Husserl is that the latter views human beings as present-at-hand objects. Although a subject perceives things within a particular horizon or "field of experience", as Ricoeur puts it (1981, p. 104), it demands suspension of the natural attitudes and dispositions from the scope of human experience.

Heidegger even notices that Husserlian phenomenology heads towards the traditional Greek philosophy of the "metaphysics of presence". To attain the ideals of science, Husserl draws upon the Greek notion of human beings as *animal rationale*. Human beings are defined as epistemological subjects. In Buren's interpretation, Heidegger believes that Husserl's notion of "intuition" in intentionality is derived from the Greek concept "*theorin*", which literally means "gazing". And this means that one can actually gaze at something fixed and not oscillating. Husserl's thesis is a theoretical attempt to secure something fixed and enduring against the contingencies of life. Heidegger therefore complains that Husserl overlooks the essential temporal and teleological nature of social reality and instead sees the "presence" of being in its

timelessness. Thus, Husserl is alleged to understand "truth" in the Greek sense of "true representation" or "identification".

In contrast to the classical "apophantical" character (true representation) of truth, Heidegger maintains that truth has an interpretative "as-structure". Truth, according to him, is an event, a happening rather than some fixed judgemental reality. Understood in these terms, he does not accept the traditional dichotomies such as sensible/nonsensible, real/ideal, which, he claims, are found in Husserl. Buren explains:

Heidegger attempts to show that Husserl understands Being and truth within the temporal horizon of the static "presence" of ideal meaning over the temporal variance of intentional acts. He subscribes, Heidegger maintains, to the traditional "couplets of oppositions" real-ideal, sensible-nonsensible, being-the valid, the historical-the transhistorical, the temporal-the atemporal (1990, p. 259).

What becomes clear from Heidegger's critique is that the meaning of Being cannot be understood in the Husserlian sense of the "immediately given". In establishing the immediacy of the "given" in consciousness, Husserl wrings out the interpretative flavour which actually gives meaningfulness to our experiences. For Heidegger there is nothing like a pure "given". What we understand or perceive is always suffused with meaning, i.e. interpretation. And, by the same token, there is nothing like a "fixed" meaning. The Husserlian idea of the immediacy of the given in consciousness is suggestive of the idea of "presence" which implies the existence of "something" a-temporal, a-historical and

non-interpretative.³

One could say that Heidegger is anticipated by Dilthey. For the standpoint from which Heidegger criticises Husserl is already provided particularly by Dilthey. According to Heidegger, Dilthey is the only person who has appropriated Husserl's phenomenology critically and has brought it from the transcendental pure world to the real socio-historical world. "Dilthey", Heidegger maintains, "was the first to understand the aims of phenomenology.... The essential point here is not so much the conceptual penetration as the sheer disclosure of new horizon for the question of the being of acts and, in the broadest sense, the being of man" (quoted by Buren, 1990, p. 250).

The crucial point that Heidegger borrows from Dilthey is the idea of *lebensphilosophie* or life-philosophy. The point is that Being can only be understood in relation to the historically developed world. This conception of historical growth overturns the traditional metaphysical subject-object dichotomy. By the same token, this attack is an attempt to establish the sovereignty of the anthropological man. This distinction between anthropology and metaphysics introduced by Dilthey is of crucial importance to Heidegger. For Heidegger, this distinction can actually help to

³Heidegger's objections are valid only in so far as the early Husserl is concerned. In his later works, Husserl himself gives up the previous conception of the subject as a cognitively sealed subject completely detached from the lived-reality. The concept which receives a significant status in the later Husserl is that of the "life-world" or "operative life". The concept of the operative life refers to that underlying working reality which overcomes the dichotomous relation between the subject and the object, the knower and the known.

highlight the distinctness of the ontological question he raises. Being indebted to Dilthey's idea of the "historicity of existence", Heidegger raises a deeper question about the meaning of historicity. This question is an ontological question, and its not being raised by Dilthey is taken by Heidegger to be a serious flaw in Dilthey's programme. For Dilthey historical existence or life is already "there". And in so far as the question of understanding the historicity of life is concerned, the task seems to be only that of a historian, that is the task of launching an investigation of the historical past and constituting a world-history. But Heidegger contends that history is not something monumental, locked inside a museum, to be investigated as an object. Nor is it a series of temporally and chronologically arranged events awaiting the historian's objective study.

Rather, the important question about history concerns the meaning of what it is to be a historical being. The question of history is therefore essentially ontological. In his own interpretation, phenomenology contributes to this ontological investigation by opening up the structural dimensions of the entity *Dasein*. In his view what is crucial about the phenomenological method is that it does not work upon the already given data, but exposes things as they are in their multidimensional roles. Phenomenology in this sense is radical and a constant philosophical *forschung* (research).

Another important feature of phenomenology that Heidegger highlights is its hermeneutical character. We shall first

delineate this aspect of phenomenology and then go on to explore the differences and similarities that exist between the Heideggerian "short and direct" approach and the Ricoeurian "long and arduous" approach to ontology.

3.2 Hermeneutics — a product of phenomenology

This section explores the underlying hermeneutic character of Heidegger's conception of phenomenology. The aim of this undertaking is to show how hermeneutics is logically related to ontology via phenomenology. Besides, the exploration also prepares the ground for extending the scope of hermeneutics beyond Heidegger's existential-phenomenological inquiry.

Heidegger's main objection against Husserlian phenomenology is that it neglects the idea of historical meaning. Husserl's theory of intentionality as that of reaching the "ultimate grounding" in consciousness mutilates the actual historical character of our "lived-experiences". The relational character of consciousness — how our experiences are related to the things in the world — is destroyed when intentionality is understood at the level of transcendental consciousness. Although it is true that the phenomenological epoche does not make consciousness worldless, it certainly underestimates the real historical world which conditions all our experiences. As has already been noted, Heidegger explains that intentionality is rooted in our everyday circumspective instrumental behaviour which serves as a ground for disclosure.

As conditioned by the everyday concerned world, our understanding is not pure perception which survives

transcendental and eidetic reduction. By "phenomena" Heidegger means unconcealment or disclosure. Now that which remains hidden, or is partially disclosed, is the opposite of phenomena. Although a phenomenon shows or manifests itself, there is, Heidegger says, nothing like a pure perception of phenomena. Every perception, according to him, is a perception from a certain standpoint. There is an intrinsic interpretative orientation in our cognition or epistemic encounter with the world. Since every object is perceived from some specific standpoint, the object is perceived as something, where the "as-character" of the object is specified in terms of the standpoint (the particular interpretative orientation) that the perceiver occupies.

Just as a phenomenon is not a pure perception devoid of all interpretative orientation, it is also not a unit isolated from the "totality-of-things". The disclosure, or unconcealment of entities, is possible only in a larger context of significations. At this ordinary level of our concernful activities entities show themselves relationally. The totality-of-significations is thus an interpretative whole which lets the entities manifest themselves. It is because we always find ourselves "thrown" in some world that our every encounter with a new situation is accompanied by fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. Thus no situation for us is drastically new. Our interpretative repertoire, which is composed in and through our participation in a social set-up, co-exists with all understanding.

Heidegger further explains that the "as-character" describes the internal constitution of "logos" — a second inextricable

says, "one must let them be seen as something unhidden" (1978, p. 56). But we must not take disclosure in the sense of agreement, or true representation.

Phenomenology understood in this (Heideggerian) way reestablishes the intrinsic historical and interpretative character of our understanding. The real locus of understanding is the concrete historical world rather than the world of abstraction.

To sum up, Heidegger raises a fundamental ontological question that has not been seriously taken up in the history of ontology. Heidegger does not add one more ontology to this bulk. His intent is rather destructive, that of dismantling the tradition which blocks our critical appreciation of the meaning of Being as such. Heidegger proceeds to examine this question by first looking at the existential structure of the entity he calls Dasein. His treatment of this ontological question is phenomenological. Complying with the cardinal theme of Husserlian phenomenology, namely, "to the things themselves", he wishes to expose the nature of Dasein in its totality. His analytic of Dasein, however, does not begin with a definite standpoint. It is, as it were, a directionless inquiry. It is an inquiry concerning how the thing under question reveals or discloses itself. It is more like witnessing the unveiling of the truth rather than constituting it in one's own way. However, a phenomenological description of a thing is not an uncontaminated pure perception. It is, on the contrary, interpretative at the very core. But one should not take the idea of interpretative disclosure to be a mere subjective

construction. A disclosure may be true or false but not in the sense in which a judgement is true or false. Its truthfulness is instead a matter of its uncoveredness. A "phenomenon", as Heidegger says, is an opposite of something which is hidden or obscure. However, a phenomenological description never guarantees a complete disclosure. A phenomenological research is thus a constant critical research — a "working out" of things.

3.3 Ricoeur's Long Route to Ontology

In Ricoeur's understanding, Heidegger's fundamental ontology is located at a level too deep to maintain any connection with the epistemological issues raised at the surface level. It leaves too wide a gap between the underlying ontological basis of understanding and the apparent epistemological structure of historical knowledge. Ricoeur's point is that if Heidegger's ontological task is to discover the fundamental base of all understanding, it must be able to resolve the epistemologico-methodological issues that hermeneutic philosophy deals with. And, more importantly, the claim is that the cognitive enterprise of interpretation is related to understanding conceived as an existential or ontological mode. But the immanent reflective character of hermeneutics can be perceived only when we return from ontology to the epistemology of interpretation. Ricoeur shows his discontentment with Heidegger's scheme of things in the following way:

With Heidegger's philosophy, we are always engaged in going back to foundation, but we are left incapable of beginning the movement of return which would lead from the fundamental ontology to the properly epistemological question of the status of the human sciences. Now a

philosophy which breaks the dialogue with the sciences is no longer addressed to anything but to itself (1981, p. 59).

Ricoeur attempts to overcome the gap between the ontological characterization of understanding and the social-scientific disciplines which study various aspects of the human-historical reality. He examines the relation between the theory of interpretation and philosophical reflection in a variety of discourses such as psychoanalysis, history, phenomenology of religion etc. Ricoeur's primary concern is to highlight the distinctive methodological strategies employed in each of these disciplines and the existential claims that they make.

Although Ricoeur deals with the epistemologico-methodological issues at length, our interest here is to see how he illuminates the reflective character of interpretation. In this regard, we shall discuss his proposed "long and arduous" route to ontology.

Ricoeur's long route to ontology signifies that one understands oneself only in and through the interpretation of the signs and symbols woven into the social fabric of our existence. Our own symbolically constituted world mediates our understanding of ourselves. Though this proposal for a "long route" does not stand in opposition to Heidegger's "short and direct" route to ontology, it attempts to show that there is no direct access to ontology — to the ontology of Dasein — independently of the epistemology of interpretation, especially self-interpretation, even if it is true that the interpretative human-historical

sciences themselves are parasitic on an ontological foundation shaped by understanding.

In fact, this relationship is mutual. While all epistemological claims about understanding are legitimate in so far as they have an ontological base, an answer to the ontological question of foundation can be obtained only by following an epistemological route.

However it is felt by Ricoeur that Heidegger's fundamental hermeneutics constitutes a "short route" to the point of destination by bypassing the question of understanding as it is involved in the enterprise of historical knowledge — that is the methodological role of understanding as it operates in the interpretative activity of finite beings while engaged in the historical world or social reality.

The bypassing of the methodological problem of understanding, or the epistemology of interpretation, which implies that no account of understanding as a mode of knowledge is given, is seen by Ricoeur as a lacuna in Heidegger. Therefore his own preferred strategy is to develop a hermeneutic theory that supplements an epistemology of interpretation to the ontology of understanding. This strategy requires taking a "long route" to ontology via an examination of the epistemic conditions under which a knowing subject can understand a text, or history itself. In other words, Ricoeur wants to provide a hermeneutic account of the possibility of our understanding of texts, the possibility of historical sciences as embodying historical knowledge of human social

reality, and the possibility of arbitration in the conflict of rival interpretations.

Dissatisfied with Heidegger's "fundamental ontology" programme, Ricoeur takes a "descending" route. The descending route is meant to pass through all the stations, as it were, that are bypassed as irrelevant, or as having only a derivative status, in Heidegger's ontology of understanding. Language draws his attention in the first place; for it is considered secondary to "understanding". In *Being and Time*, language appears only when the concepts of "understanding" and "interpretation" are discussed. Language is held to be subservient to understanding, for it works as a tool to "show" or "manifest". Language, for Heidegger, serves a communicative purpose. Its function is only to communicate what is already understood. Contrary to this view, Ricoeur argues that human existence is essentially symbolically constituted. His claim is that the primordially of understanding cannot be separated from its linguistic or symbolic character. We are interpreting beings because our existence is intrinsically meaningful. In Ricoeur's words, "If life is not originally meaningful, understanding is forever impossible" (1974, p. 5).

If the social fabric of human-historical existence is woven by various cultural symbols and other sign-systems, then human social life is intrinsically meaning-imbued. And any symbolically constituted reality can be understood only by way of interpretation. Hence, even if it is true that for us "to be is to understand" — that our being human consist in our understanding of ourselves and the world — we cannot disclose to ourselves this

ontic truth without going through the layers of signifying symbols that permeate and constitute our actual existential field, our life-world. Our being historically situated just means our entrenchment in the symbolically constituted life-world. Hence there is an inevitable need to proceed interpretatively through the concrete contents of historical existence, where interpretation plays the epistemic role of revealing the fundamental ontological basis of human existence as structured by understanding.

What Ricoeur does not find convincing in Heidegger's ontologico-phenomenological exercise is its sudden turning to the foundation. For Ricoeur, the disclosure of Being cannot be directly encountered; rather, one reaches it only through the hermeneutical aid. Here Ricoeur complies with the general spirit of a hermeneutic approach. An interpretative disclosure of anything means grasping it through the circular movement of part and whole. Thus, it is not a sudden disclosure of the thing. When the issue is that of understanding human-historical reality as such, the disclosure of truth is developmental — that is, it proceeds through various intermediary phases. In Heidegger, the truth of historicity is revealed at the authentic moment of anticipating one's death; but, for Ricoeur, every hermeneutic instance, in its own restricted scope, reveals the finitude of human reality. Every hermeneutic instance reveals some truth rather than the reality as a whole. The meaning of historical reality, for him, is constituted by an individual who is

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constantly engaged in interpreting his own symbolically constituted world.

Besides, Ricoeur shows that this "turning to the foundation" approach actually presupposes what it claims to deny. For, as he argues, Heidegger's search for ontological grounding is built upon the recognition that understanding is a mode of knowing before it is shown to be a mode of being. And, above all, the discovery that understanding is an ontological mode finds its expression only through language. Ricoeur explains:

The difficulty in passing from understanding as a mode of knowledge to understanding as a mode of being consists in the following: the understanding which is the result of the Analytic of Dasein is precisely the understanding through which and in which the being understands itself as being. Is it not once again within language itself that we must seek an indication that understanding is a mode of being? (1974, p. 11).

Ricoeur attempts to vitalise the link, between the ontology of understanding and the concrete historical life dispersed in a variety of cultural forms, which becomes feeble in Heidegger's ontological inquiry. Drawing upon Dilthey's triad "experience, expression and understanding", he argues that life can be understood only by interpreting what is expressed or manifested. For Dilthey, the "objectifications of the mind" constitute an intermediate ground for self-understanding. This intermediate position in Ricoeur's case is the whole of our symbolic existence. Again, on this point of mediation, Ricoeur differs from Heidegger. Although he agrees with Heidegger on the point that the world mediates understanding, his conception of the mediation of the world is not restricted to our "concernful activities". The world,

for him, is not a mere "totality of things" that are assigned various utilitarian meanings. It is also a manifestation of the creative communal mind. In his words, "the world is not the totality of manipulable objects, but is the horizon of our life and our project, in short, is *lebenswelt* (life-world) (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 112). And since our social existence is governed by certain world-views, and as such it is culturally and historically developed, it necessarily becomes an object of interpretative understanding. The whole of our human-historical existence is thus a hermeneutical problem.

However, the hermeneutics of signs ultimately aims at the ontological truth. But as proceeding through a long route, it takes the concept of reflection as an intermediary step. "Reflection", according to Ricoeur, "[establishes] the link between the understanding of signs and self-understanding" (1974, p. 16). It is by taking the philosophy of reflection as a middle ground that Ricoeur speaks about the grafting of hermeneutics onto phenomenology. A phenomenological approach is an inward-directed reflective movement. This inner reflectivity is the crux of a phenomenological experience. Ricoeur takes this inwardness of phenomenology to show that the hermeneutics of signs also displays this reflectivity, i.e. it relates the interpreter to his own being.

Ricoeur suggests that there are two ways in which hermeneutics is grafted onto phenomenology. One is the direct ontology of understanding Heidegger has spoken of, and the other is the indirect route to ontology that he himself is proposing.

What his notion of symbolically mediated (long route to) ontology suggests is that the hermeneutics of symbols establishes a connection with existence only via the philosophy of reflection. But that an interpretative approach, or a "semantic" approach (as Ricoeur calls it) is a "reflective" approach does not entail that an interpreter thereby encounters his pure self. The *self* in self-understanding is not a Cartesian *cogito* which captures itself in an unmediated manner in a reflective act. For him every interpretative task is rather that of questioning the immediate ego. And the immediate ego, he concedes, is a false, narcissistic ego.

Thus, a hermeneutic exercise is that of terminating the false ego and deepening one's understanding of oneself. In this sense, hermeneutics is a critique of ego-consciousness. It is reflective but there is no encountering of the transcendental ego. Reflection, Ricoeur holds, is not a blind intuition, but is mediated by the expressions in which life objectifies itself — that is the various signs and symbols of the human world of culture. Reflection is a critique of the works and acts which are the signs or expressions of our effort to live. As Ricoeur remarks: "Reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be by means of [a critique of] the works which testify to this effort and this desire, [such that] the cogito can be recovered only by the detour of a decipherment of the documents of its life" (1974, p. 18). The self rather has the character of what he calls "being-interpreted" (1974, p. 11).

Commenting on the reflectivity of the semantic approach, he writes:

In proposing to relate symbolic language to self-understanding, I think, I fulfil the deepest will of hermeneutics. The purpose of all interpretation is to conquer a remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself. By overcoming this distance, by making himself contemporary with the text, the exegete can appropriate its meaning to himself: foreign, he makes it familiar, that is, he makes it own. It is thus the growth of his own understanding of himself that he peruses through understanding of the other. Every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others (1974, pp. 16-17).

In Ricoeur's later writings, this relation between ontology and hermeneutics through the phenomenological mediation becomes all the more clear. In *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, he takes up the very significant task of reestablishing the philosophical significance of Husserlian phenomenology which has been seriously affected by the Heideggerian interpretation of phenomenology. In his later works, Ricoeur no longer sticks to the later Husserl, whose contributions towards strengthening the historicity of understanding are undeniable. He instead turns to Husserl's earlier writings, *Logical Investigations* and *Cartesian Meditations*, to argue that phenomenology constitutes an unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics. (However, he also shows that hermeneutics is presupposed by phenomenology at the same time.) Phenomenology, according to Ricoeur, is able to provide a foundation for hermeneutics only when we rule out the idealistic interpretation of it. Ricoeur points out those features of phenomenology which are non-idealistic in nature and takes them as points of departure for his own theory of understanding. We

shall here briefly deal with Ricoeur's interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology. The discussion will enable us to see how much of Ricoeur's own hermeneutic approach to ontology draws upon Husserlian phenomenology and, at the same time, distanciates itself from Heidegger's ontological account.

Ricoeur argues that despite the fact that a phenomenological approach suspends all *seinglaube* (beliefs, opinions etc.) to fix its gaze on meaning-content, a phenomenological reduction is not an idealistic reduction. Suspension of beliefs and other natural attitudes does not imply that meaning is constituted in the inner horizon of an isolated being. Rather, to say that the transcendental consciousness constitutes the meaning of objects is to imply that there already exists an intersubjective "field of meaning" which facilitates the synthetic operation of the transcendental ego. What Ricoeur argues is that the transcendental ego can in no way establish its supremacy because consciousness itself is rooted in the intersubjectively constituted semantic network.

Corresponding to the idea of the givenness of the "field of meaning" or "lived-experience", there is the notion of "cultural belongingness" in the hermeneutic context. Cultural belongingness signifies our rootedness in the tradition transmitted to us in the form of written words, institutions, monuments and so on. It signifies our historical lived-experience. Ricoeur here sees the legitimacy of the notion of phenomenological *epoche*, which constitutes a counterpart of lived-experience. An *epoche*, he says, is an intuitional movement of consciousness towards meaning. In an

epoche, lived-experiences are rendered significant. On the hermeneutic plane, he finds the idea of "distanciation" constituting a dialectical counterpart of the notion of "cultural belongingness". The movement of distanciation, for Ricoeur, has a critical power in that it is through distanciation that our own belongingness is rendered meaningful.

By grafting the dialectic between "cultural belongingness" and "alienating distanciation" onto the phenomenological dialectic of "lived-experience" and "epoche", Ricoeur highlights the critical dimension of understanding. In so far as distanciation is an interruption, a rupture in our historical understanding, it has a critical or reflective function. It is through distanciation from our own cultural belongingness that we are able to reflect upon our historical groundedness.

Turning to the notion of language, Ricoeur is able to shed more light on the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics. He finds that in both phenomenology and hermeneutics, language is given a derivative status in relation to experience. Referring to Gadamer's pioneering work, *Truth and Method*, he says that though *sprachlichkeit* (linguisticity) has been recognized as pervading all experiences, hermeneutic philosophy actually begins with the profundity of experiences. Whether it is aesthetic or historical matter, hermeneutic philosophy is primarily interested in their ontological import rather than their linguistic decoding. Gadamer himself argues that an aesthetic experience reveals "truth" — the truth of human-historical existence. Even with regard to historical

experience what is fundamental is the consciousness of the effectiveness of history rather than the linguistic analysis of the material transmitted by the past.

Corresponding to the primacy of the hermeneutic experience, Ricoeur notices a pre-predicative, noetic-noematic structure which precedes any linguistic analysis in phenomenology. In Husserl's later work *Crisis*, this pre-linguistic level takes on the shape of a philosophy of *lebenswelt*. Husserl sees the entire *lebenswelt* as an experiential reality of the human-historical world. However, Ricoeur clarifies that this experiential dimension is not to be taken as the "emotional envelop of human experience" (1981, p. 119). Instead, as he says, it should be construed as "the reservoir of meaning", "the surplus of sense in living experience" which actually precedes any conscious reflective gaze (1981, p. 119).

Ricoeur does not stop at this level but goes on to explore the hermeneutic presupposition of phenomenology. What he now says is that phenomenology essentially works along with the hermeneutic concept of *auslegung* or interpretation. He even claims that it is due to the hermeneutic element that phenomenology is prevented from collapsing into an idealistic position. Interestingly, Ricoeur points out that the concept of interpretation figures in Husserl's writings of the idealistic period. What corresponds to interpretation in *Logical Investigations* is the idea of elucidation — "a significance-conferring act" on to intuition. All that is revealed in consciousness is the elucidation of phenomena. And elucidation is never free from the subjective

standpoint. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, *auslegung* is not restricted to yielding the meaning of well-formed expressions but relates to the meaning of experience as a whole. Here *auslegung*, Ricoeur claims, even works as a solution to the problem of egology. The problem of solipsism is safely avoided when it is shown that the phenomenology of self-constitution always includes the whole. In every intentional synthesis the other, the common world, is also constituted. The inclusion of the whole world, in active and passive modes, by virtue of our intersubjectivity, also solves the problem of understanding the other. The other is not understood by us imaginatively but as "another monad" constituted by apperception in our own horizon. The notion of "apperception" not only secures the original unity of I and thou; it also allows the constitution or construction of the other in me, which amounts to the understanding of the other person.

The meaning of *auslegung* is preserved in the notions of "elucidation", "apperception" and "constitution" in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and *Cartesian Meditations*. By elucidating the presence of *auslegung* in Husserl's works, especially his earlier works, Ricoeur not only strengthens the relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology, but also demonstrates that phenomenology is not possible without the method of interpretation. To put it differently, the truth of a phenomenological experience can never be grasped without interpretation. It is this inextricable unity of truth and method that, according to Ricoeur, corresponds to the juxtaposition of phenomenology and hermeneutics. And it is this unity — the

intimacy between truth and method — that forms the core of Ricoeur's argument that one must resort to the "long route" to ontology.

The idea of "constitution" found in Husserlian phenomenology enables us to see the two senses of hermeneutics as reflected in the views of Heidegger and Ricoeur. (This point of "constitution" emerges very powerfully in Ricoeur's theory of narrative understanding. We shall discuss it in the next chapter). It is due to their different conceptions of "interpretative understanding" that they differ on the nature of an ontological investigation. In Heidegger, "disclosure" is a phenomenological concept, which means "laying open the things" which are covered up or disguised. The "coveredness" of the object is a hermeneutic problem to him, but the truth that is revealed is a sudden disclosure. Intentionality, for Heidegger, is not a property of the transcendental consciousness. That is understanding is not a matter of grasping how the objects appear in consciousness as intended objects, but a matter of how they are encountered within the worldly concernful affairs.

Whereas Heidegger disregards Husserl's notion of "constitution", Ricoeur perceives it as providing a phenomenological foundation for hermeneutics. In Ricoeur, we find that what is disclosed or encountered is a result of constitution — i.e., constitution of the meaning of the objects of interpretation. Since constitution is a synthetic operation, the truth that is disclosed is a construction. It is constituted within a signifying matrix and because of which it becomes an

object of knowledge. It is this creative side of intentionality that has been ignored by Heidegger.

"Truth as disclosure" and "truth as constitution" bring to light the two senses of hermeneutics. The former viewpoint represents no relation between truth and method, the latter recognizes the requirement of a method in the pursuit of truth.

The following quote from Ricoeur elucidates the differences between him and Heidegger:

The ontology of understanding which Heidegger sets up directly by a sudden reversal of the problem, substituting the consideration of a mode of being for that of a mode of knowing, can be, for us who proceed indirectly and by degree, only a horizon, an aim rather than a given fact. A separate ontology is beyond our grasp: it is only within the movement of interpretation that we appreciate the being we interpret. The ontology of understanding is implied in the methodology of interpretation, following the ineluctable "hermeneutic circle" which Heidegger himself taught us to delineate. Moreover, it is only in a conflict of rival hermeneutics that we perceive something of the being to be interpreted: a unified ontology is as inaccessible to our method as a separate ontology, each hermeneutics discovers the aspect of existence which founds it as method (1974, p. 19).

However, the hermeneutic task as conceived by Ricoeur in a post-Heideggerian spirit is in no way anti-Heideggerian in intent. The common intent of hermeneutics, whether of Heidegger or of Ricoeur, is to arrive at an ontology of understanding — that is the ontology of finite being, a kind of being which exists in and through understanding. This is precisely what constitutes the "fundamental ontology" programme of Heidegger, a "fundamental hermenenutics" as Ricoeur calls it (1974, p. 10).

On the whole, Ricoeur admits that historical knowledge is subordinated to ontological understanding, and that ontological

understanding is primordial understanding from which historical understanding — that is understanding as an interpretative method employed in the epistemic encounter with historical reality. But, unlike Heidegger "who gives us no way to show in what sense historical understanding, properly speaking, is derived from this primordial understanding", Ricoeur believes that it would be better "to begin with the derived forms of understanding and to show in them the signs of their derivation" (1974, p.10).

Thus, what has been considered by Heidegger as philosophically unimportant is taken up by Ricoeur as constituting a significant detour to develop an adequate theory of hermeneutics. But we must note that the possibility of developing an adequate theory is already found in Heidegger. Heidegger never fails to recognize the cognitive dimension of understanding, though it is true that the hermeneutic problem of our encounter with the socio-cultural reality does not figure as a philosophically demanding problem. The very positing of Dasein as that entity which questions its being means that it understands itself. Since the world mediates its understanding, Dasein actually reflects upon or questions its own worldliness or thrownness. Since every question involves a "why" question, our engagement in the world is a hermeneutic engagement. Or we can say that the mode in which Dasein lives in the historically conditioned world is an epistemic mode. Since understanding (or questioning) is what distinguishes Dasein from other entities, understanding must therefore be constitutive of the being of Dasein. To put it differently, understanding must be an ontic

feature of Dasein. It is in this feature of understanding, we must note, that Heidegger locates fundamental ontology. The mode of our existence is defined by him as the mode of understanding. That is to say, understanding is the ontological essence of our Being. Thus, we can say that Heidegger's attention shifts from our hermeneutic-cognitive engagement in the world to knowing the fundamental essence of our Being — the ontological condition — which makes historical knowledge of the *lebenswelt* possible.

Yet, we cannot ignore the significant contributions made by Ricoeur's theory of "linguistically mediated understanding". The significance of his theory lies in drawing our attention to the importance of historical knowledge which facilitates the path that leads us to the ontological truth. With an emphasis on the idea of "constitution", Ricoeur attempts to do justice to the reality of human beings as interpretative beings. What is important for him is the lived-temporality of the human Dasein. The journey from birth to death is a journey of understanding our historical situatedness. The human Dasein is a cognitively engaged subject. It is this interlocking of the ontological and the epistemological dimensions of understanding that Ricoeur emphasises in his "long route" to ontology. It is the fact that the human subject is consciously engaged in interpreting the historical world, and that only through the act of interpretation does he appropriate the meaning of historicity, that has been sidetracked in Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Although Heidegger's ontology aims at unfolding the meaning of Dasein's "everydayness", it surely overlooks *how* an individual being, in his distinctive identity,

acquires the meaning of his own existence. Ricoeur's theory fills up these gaps in Heidegger's theory and in this sense his theory can rightly be appreciated as an insightful addition to that of Heidegger's.

Two Modes of Linguistically Mediated Understanding

Metaphysics seems to lose its privileged status just when the history of philosophy begins to take a "linguistic turn". The primacy of the thinking self as specified by pure rationality is now taken over by the self construed in inextricably linguistic terms. The *Cogito* no longer enjoys its epistemic infallibility once it is announced by hermeneutic philosophy that "We are a conversation".¹ The self-certainty of the ego-consciousness is now marred by the enormous contingencies which are experienced by individuals in the linguistic conversation of mankind. The idea of the acquisition of self-evident truth that was thought to be the privilege of the epistemological self is shattered once it is said that "truth is an event in a dialogical situation".² The sudden "happening" of truth gives a dent to the enduring presence of the Absolute, the highest being whose appropriation is either a archaeological or a teleological movement. Truth is now neither self-evident in one's consciousness nor a final *telos* where the entire history of its manifestation finds its culmination.

¹The mode of our existence is defined by Gadamer as conversational, but he thinks that the nature of language is still a mystery to us. Thus, he approaches the mysterious nature of language from what he calls "the conversation that we ourselves are" (1975, p. 340).

²While arguing that truth is an undeniable feature of the domain of the human sciences, Gadamer alludes to Heidegger's notion of *Erignis* which is an event of the appropriation of Being. The eventfulness of truth here refers to a transformative moment that an interpreter undergoes in a hermeneutic event. However, the happening of truth presupposes a dialogical situation and the success of a dialogue is defined by Gadamer as "a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were" (1975, p. 341).

Furthermore, the conversational account of human existence also takes away the pride enjoyed by the "I" in its solitary thinking process. The knowing subject now is also a "willing, feeling and imaginative being [who lives with others]" (Dilthey, 1976, p. 162). The self is no longer an enclosed horizon or hermetically sealed in its subjectivity, rather; it is there in the midst of the world — the world it inhabits with other beings. The self is, as Heidegger says, a being-with-others.

Perhaps this "linguistic turn" is the need of the present. After Heidegger's critique of metaphysics, the idea of human subjectivity conceived metaphysically becomes a relic of the past. It receives a shocking assault when deconstruction subverts the idea of the self-same subject — the fundamental question of philosophy — and lands us in some kind of an impasse. Nevertheless, in such a situation, the general spirit of hermeneutic philosophy can still be considered to be expressive of optimism. For it ushers in a new mode of constructive philosophical theorizing about human self-understanding. Expressing this faith in hermeneutic philosophy Calvin O. Schrag says:

Now the proper response to this unsettling state of affairs, we should urge, is not a further probing of epistemological space and its protocols of pure theory (categories, propositions and beliefs), but rather a shift to another space and another strategy of questioning. In this shift the question of "who" is addressed against the backcloth of the conversation, habits, skills and institutional involvements that limn the hermeneutical space of communicative praxis.... One can always suspend beliefs and their putative criteria for justification, but one cannot escape one's praxis — one's linguistic and institutional engagements. One can always defer theoretical judgements about oneself, but in the meantime one continues to speak, act, work, play and assume social

roles. This is the domain of communicative praxis, and it is here, we suggest, that we look for a possible restoration of subjectivity (1989, p. 27).

The "linguistic turn" announced by hermeneutic philosophy develops into two directions of subjectivity. One is the view that the self is communicative by essence. That is to say, the self emerges only in concrete communicative instances. Such a position is held by Gadamer. The other view, developed by Ricoeur, is that self-understanding is essentially a form of narrative understanding. In other words, self-understanding is a narrative articulation of one's lived-temporality, one's life. What motivates both the views — the communicative essence of the self and the narrative constitution of the self — is the common intent of theorizing on the nature of the human individual in a non-metaphysical and non-rationalist spirit. Both these standpoints are attempts to restore the notion of the self or subjectivity in the wake of the demise of the Cartesian and the Hegelian self. Both Gadamer and Ricoeur share the Heideggerian critique of the metaphysical essence of the self and reconstitute the picture of the locus of subjectivity as woven into the fabric of language. Indeed, it is from this critique and Heidegger's existential-phenomenology that their hermeneutic philosophy takes its rise.

4.1 Gadamer's Theory of Dialogical Understanding

The central idea of Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy is that understanding is essentially linguistic. Thus when he makes a claim about the universality of hermeneutics, he alludes to the linguistic constitution of understanding. To say that

understanding is immanently linguistic is to say that it has an "as-structure": that is, when we understand something, we understand it as something and this "understanding-as" is primarily structured by language. In other words, the "as-characterization" of our understanding of things means that we articulate them from a certain standpoint. And to articulate is to view things under some specific linguistic characterization. Essentially, the linguisticity of understanding refers to its interpretative structure. Following Heidegger, Gadamer says that "understanding and interpretation indissolubly are bound up with one another" (1975, p. 360).

4.1.1 Gadamer's defense of the linguisticity of understanding

Gadamer maintains that this intrinsic linguisticity of understanding goes unrecognized in the western metaphysical tradition. In this tradition, language is considered to be a means of communicating knowledge and not constitutive of it. Even as a means, language is looked down upon owing to the belief that it only allows a distorted presentation of reality. Thus, the relationship that language has with reason or thought is believed to be that of appearance and reality, of the image and the original.

Plato speaks about the inherent weakness of language along with the other means of communication such as *Onoma* — name or word, *logos* — explanation or conceptual determination and *eidolon* — appearance, illustrative image, example and figure. The common weakness of these means is that they represent reality and in that they mislead us to take what is merely the image of the real for

the real itself. And the weakness of these means implies the weakness of the human intellect. It is at this juncture that Plato turns to reason, which alone, according to him, is capable of capturing the Good — the absolute knowledge. Gadamer explains this gap between knowledge and the means by which it is communicated in the following way:

All four means are trapped in the dialectic of the image or copy, for insofar as all four are intended to present the thing in and through themselves they must of necessity have a reality of their own. That which is meant to *present* something cannot *be* that thing. It lies in the nature of the means of knowing that in order to be means they must have something inessential about them. This, according to Plato, is the source of our error, for we are always misled into taking that which is inessential for something essential (1980, pp. 112-113).

Thus, when Plato speaks about the distinction between *doxa* (opinion) and *episteme* (knowledge), he refers, on the one hand, to the corrupt and impure linguistic perception of things at the empirical level and, on the other, to the translucent character of knowledge at the transcendental level. *Doxa*, because of its intrinsic impurities, does not enjoy the status of knowledge. It remains merely at the level of appearance, not of reality.

Gadamer raises his voice against the Platonic distinction between common opinion and knowledge, discourse and reason. We must note, however, that Gadamer is strongly drawn to the Platonic conviction that language constitutes a locus of our worldly affairs. In other words, the idea that language fabricates the web of our socio-communal existence, even while remaining an inadequate means of capturing the pureness of being, is taken up by Gadamer to his own advantage. As a matter of fact, it is this

Greek idea of the immanent linguisticity of human existence that he wishes to canvas widely through his programme of hermeneutic philosophy. So, although he is strongly against the idea of drawing a sharp distinction between language and reality, he exploits this distinction of traditional western metaphysics and turns it into a foundational point of departure for his hermeneutic programme.

Gadamer's exploitation of western metaphysics (which is subject to Heidegger's critique) for the purposes of hermeneutic philosophy, however, does not affect his Heideggerian base. But, while being indebted to Heideggerian philosophy, he also clearly distinguishes his own programme from that of the latter. Although the problem of traditional western metaphysics or philosophy is taken up by Gadamer for a thorough and critical examination, he does not undertake the challenging task of reconstituting the foundation of western metaphysics in the way Heidegger does. His own contribution is that of giving a hermeneutic turn to western philosophy. In giving this turn he creates a new route that philosophy can take in the wake of Heidegger's radical criticism of western metaphysics. And in advancing in this creative direction he vitally draws upon Hegel's philosophy. However, his indebtedness to Hegel in no way overshadows his fidelity to Heidegger.

The point where Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy intersects with the western tradition is the view that language is "speculative" in character. What catches Gadamer's attention, in the first place, is the metaphor of mirror so frequently used to

characterize language in this tradition. Plato holds that in mirroring reality language only presents us an image, an appearance. The use of this metaphor here has a negative air about it; for language does not mirror reality faithfully. Since Plato finds the idea of image problematic, he takes the indicative function of signs as definitive of language. Gadamer is not so much attracted to the idea of signs as he is to the discarded notion of an image in Plato's theory. It is the idea of a mirror-image that he develops in his theory of language with the help of Hegel.

Drawing upon Hegel's speculative metaphysics, Gadamer points to the inner reflectivity of language. He draws our attention to the word *speculum* (mirror) of which "speculative" is a derivative. Gadamer argues that in a mirror-image the original and the reflected things are one and the same thing. What is reflected in a mirror is not different from the thing reflected. However, besides emphasising this oneness, he also talks about the active role that the mirror-image performs in making the original "more" than what it is. In other words, language not only mirrors the original (i.e., object, event or fact) but, in doing so, also has a repercussion on the original. In appearing in the mirror of language, the original does not simply appear, but through the appearing it becomes more than what it is. Kathleen Wright explains this idea of mirror-image in the following way:

The reflection in the mirror, the mirror-image, makes the object more, that is, makes the object into the "original" rather than the "image". The object is more as a result of its being reflected *back from* the mirror-image. In other words, as reflected into the mirror the object remains the same in its being as a result of

its appearing. As reflected back from the mirror the object becomes other than it was. Now, as the original, it becomes more than its appearing although it does so only in and through its appearing (1986, p. 207).

Gadamer finds Hegel's example of what can be called a speculative judgement or statement very useful in this regard. For instance, "God is one" is a statement which, according to Hegel, is a speculative statement. What is speculative about this statement is that it is potentially more than what it expresses as a proposition. Undoubtedly, such a sentence has the subject-predicate structure of a proposition, in which some attribute is predicated of the subject-term. However, in the above example, "one" is not predicated of "God"; rather, "oneness" or "unity" defines God. Oneness is the essence of Godhood. Thus, despite having a simple subject-predicate structure, the statement is capable of saying more than what would be meant were the statement to be taken in the predicative sense. It says "more" because in it the subject and the predicate get interfused. Hegel calls it a speculative unity.

Gadamer exploits this Hegelian idea of speculative unity so as to argue for the indissolubility of language and reason or thought. His thesis is that thoughts or the meaning-contents of a hermeneutic object do not exist independently of the linguistic form in which they are couched. The integration of language and reason forms the foundation of his theory of hermeneutic consciousness. However, we must note that Gadamer here does not invoke the Enlightenment belief that every linguistic form (i.e. a sentence, statement or text) is logically (or rationally) related to a determinate meaning-content. The point is that a

hermeneutic endeavour does not mean grasping the rational content of a written discourse as that universal which remains unchanged even in historically unique situations. Hermeneutics or the art of understanding cannot be reduced, in the manner of the universal-grammatical mode of representation, to a "a rational (*raisonnee*) decoding of the language in which the discourse of the text is couched" (Frank, 1989, p. 152). Rather, it believes in the possibility of multiple meanings of a text in different interpretative contexts.

A hermeneutic endeavour is not directed at a rational reconstruction of anything; rather, it is a process of understanding what is "given" in a discourse. Since the "immediately given" is presented in a linguistic form, it becomes an object of interpretation. But the "given" is not to be confused with the pure and objective "meaning-content" which can be revealed only through eidetic reduction, or phenomenological bracketing of one's natural attitude. Rather, the meaning-content or thought is fully immanent in the expression or language. Thus, one does not actually have to go beyond the expressed form to identify the real meaning-content. There is no pure thought or reason beyond the language in which it finds its expression. However, the meaning latent in the object awaits an interpretative act to become manifest. The "ideality of meaning" in a hermeneutic object is rendered apparent through its interpretative actualization. But, apart from the concrete contingent interpretative acts, meaning does not reside in some extra linguistic forms. As Gadamer writes:

Its [language's] universality keeps pace with the universality of reason. Hermeneutic consciousness is only participating in something that constitutes the general relation between language and reason. If all understanding stands in a necessary relation of equivalence of its possible interpretation and if there are basically no bounds set to understanding, then the linguistic form within which the interpretation of this understanding finds must contain within it an infinite dimension that transcends all bounds. Language is the language of reason. (1975, p. 363).

Even though "language is the language of reason", Gadamer does not overlook the alleged distinction between meaning-contents and signs. But he argues that it is no real distinction at all. He writes:

That which can be understood is language. This means that it is not such a nature that of itself it offers itself to be understood.... To be expressed in language does not mean that a second being is acquired. The way in which a thing presents itself is, rather, part of its own being. Thus, everything that is language has a speculative unity. It contains a distinction between its being and the way in which it presents itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all (Gadamer, 1975, p. 432).

The ideal of speculative unity, or the intimate link between thought and word, suggests that being or the "thing-in-itself" presents itself in language. But for Gadamer being is not the Kantian "thing-in-itself" which remains undisturbed by the contingencies of the actual event of interpretation. If being is truth, then for Gadamer truth reveals itself only in the concrete instances of interpretation. The idea of truth as an emergent insight of an interpretative event is quite revolutionary in as much as it demolishes or outplaces the traditional metaphysical idea of truth as a kind of atemporal being waiting to be discovered in and through a cognitive process. The

"temporalization" of, or "emergentism" about, truth is beautifully explained by Gadamer with the help of the analogy of a play. Just as a play comes into being only when the players engage in a game, so also truth emerges only when the truth-seekers engage in an interpretative act. Thus, "truth", or what "is", is not distinct from what is disclosed in an interpretative moment.³

There are certain points in the Hegelian speculative dialectic which Gadamer considers to be significant for his own theory. First: the idea that thinking is mediated by a dialectical process. What it says is that nothing is known prior to a dialectical process. The object of knowledge emerges in the dialectical interplay of ideas or concepts. The dialectic is not a special feature of Hegel's system; it is fundamentally a Greek idea. Second: the speculative character of language. Language in the speculative sense differs from language in the sense of the representation of reality in the point that, unlike that of representational language, the meaning-content of speculative language is never fixed or determinate. Fixity or determinateness of meaning is the hallmark of representational language because in it the assertoric form is the paradigm of a meaningful sentence, where meaning is fixed in terms of some determinate correspondence relation with reality. By contrast, speculative language conveys

³Truth as an interpretative event is essentially a Heideggerian idea. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes it from the classical representational view of truth. Later, after the *kehre*, which gives a new turn to his philosophical thinking, Heidegger adds a temporal dimension to the earlier hermeneutic conception of truth. Truth, thus, is not merely an interpretative disclosure but also an event — an interpretative event. Gadamer borrows this conception from Heidegger.

meaning in an openended, revealing and reflective manner, without linking itself to reality in terms of plain correspondence.

However, Gadamer notices that Hegel does not allow for the distinction between the speculative and the dialectic, and that this leads to a tension in his system. Hegel's dialectical process surpasses the limits of language and culminates in what Gadamer calls, "the totality of known knowledge, the self-awareness of the concept" (1975, p. 426). The self-awareness of the concept is not distinct from what is being stated. Language, in this sense, transcends its finite and capricious character and freezes completely in a judgemental form. Therefore language in Hegel's dialectic is no longer constitutive of human experiences; it does not present a hermeneutic problem. Gadamer believes that Hegel is a Greek heir in this regard. For Plato's dialectic also moves from the many to the one, that is to the highest idea of the "Good". Gadamer's objection to Plato's and Hegel's dialectics is that they reduce language to "statement". Once language is held to be assertoric, it loses its inner richness and turns into a system of mathematical or technical vocabulary.

Gadamer in fact believes that this growing technisation of language in the present scientific age is a Greek predicament. Plato's conception of language as signs, where signs merely have an indicative function, is responsible, to a great extent, for this temperament. The mistake that Plato commits, according to Gadamer, is that he sees language in its fragmented form. One can never attain a comprehensive picture of language if it is studied

structurally in terms of its signs and meanings. The same mistake, according to Gadamer, is also committed by Husserl. In Husserl, every sign or expression is conceived as an autonomous entity which possesses an ideal meaning. Gadamer's objection to this reductive approach towards language is that it tempers with the wholesome, healthy, and communicative character of language. He raises a series of questions to defend this claim. We may examine the argumentative intent of the questions that he raises. Gadamer asks: "But does language let itself be grasped on the basis of its elements, such as word and meaning?... Where is the multiplicity of meaning really located? Isn't it to be found in the constitutional sense that takes place in the concrete give and take of language, and not in the factuality of signs themselves?" (1989, p. 115)

The crucial point that Gadamer brings to light is that language is essentially communicative and is constitutive of our socio-communal existence. Our conversational socio-communal existence rests on the living reality of language. And, surely, we do not converse merely by producing statements. The speakability or communicability of language does not necessarily rest on its judgemental mode. We do not use language as a tool; rather, we live in it, grow with it. The fact that languages live, grow and die (and associated with them is the fate of the communities) is a fact about their finite character. And the finitude of language is a finitude of human existence. Over and above this linguistic constitution of our understanding there is not any realm of pure ideas. It is a mistake to believe that

signs possess ideal character. Internal to language is the dialectic of multiplication or the logic of dissemination. Language always functions in its totality and this accounts for its finite character. In Gadamer's own words:

Every word breaks forth as if from a centre and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a whole. Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole of the view of the world which lies behind it appear. Thus every word, in its momentariness, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and indicating.... All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is within it an infinity of meaning to be elaborated and interpreted. That is why the hermeneutical phenomenon also can be illuminated only in the light of this fundamental finitude of being, which is wholly linguistic in character (1975, p. 416).

The Hegelian idea of the speculative constitutes a point of departure for Gadamer's theory. Gadamer wishes to overcome the aforesaid tension in Hegel's philosophy. He proposes a new dialectic which he calls the hermeneutic dialectic. He argues that the new dialectic does not clash with the idea of the speculative. The classical Socratic-Platonic conception of dialogue plays a significant role in developing a hermeneutical dialectic.

4.1.2 Hermeneutic Dialectic

For Socrates dialogue is the only mode through which the attainment of any knowledge is possible. What is crucial in the conversational account of understanding is its inherent logic of question and answer which enables the thing under question to reveal itself. An important point about dialogue is that it is not controlled by individual wills; rather, it has, as it were, its own being. It not only reveals the "matter" under discussion

but also shows a direction along which the persons engaged may even correct their own dogmatic conceptions. Thus, a dialogue embodies a corrective power or a negative force. The cancellation of one's unscrutinised beliefs in the light of the matter discussed is the very essence of a dialogue.

On the basis of the Socratic-Platonic conception of dialogue, Gadamer develops a theory of hermeneutic conversation. The claim is that understanding has a communicative structure. For Gadamer the primordial function of language is communication; it defines the communicative or dialogical structure of understanding. The primary motivation of Gadamer's theory is to bridge the Platonic gap between knowledge and language. Language, for Plato, is only a deficient mode of communication; it fails to represent knowledge in its actual form. Knowledge for him is a property of being and is distinguished from the medium through which it can be communicated. The crucial idea that Gadamer draws from Socrates' dialogical model is that knowledge is not an element of being, but a process that involves the subjective attitude of the knower. If, for Socrates, dialogue conditions knowledge, it essentially demands the participation of individual beings, though, at the same time, it is true that dialogue takes its own course. Gadamer uses this point to attack traditional metaphysics.

In metaphysics the thought, or the highest truth, unfolds itself in its entirety to the infinite intellect. In other words, there is a total mediation between thought and being as the absolute mind re-totalizes the entire progress of the Spirit. The Hegelian dialectic of thought, that is the completion of the

unfolding process of history in the infinite mind, is undoubtedly a Greek heir, in this regard. Contrary to this supra-subjective view of understanding, Gadamer puts forward another kind of dialectic which proceeds only through interpretative mediation and does not end at any fixed point. Hermeneutic dialectic offers us a new conception of "belongingness" that goes against the metaphysical idea of belonging as the interfusion of thought and being. The interfusion of thought and being suggests that knowledge is not a matter of subjective attitudes and efforts of the knower, but is a feature of being. According to the new conception, belongingness does not mean the harmonious fusion of thought and being at the transcendental level; rather, it means that both the subject and the object belong to the same socio-cultural matrix as interactive beings.

An important point about the hermeneutic interpretation of "belongingness" is that it assigns more importance to the dialogical relation as such. A dialogical event has, as it were, its own being which involves both the knower and the known in the dialectical interplay of questions and counter-questions. However, the dialectic of thought or the unfolding of the "thing itself" is not a process completely free from the subjective interventions of the participants. A dialogue brings to the fore the "thing under question" but it is possible only with the special aid of what Gadamer calls "being negative towards itself". It is only through the inner logic of question and answer that the truth of the "thing discussed" asserts itself. There lies a negative but corrective force in the process of question and counter-question.

It helps the interlocutors cancel their own one-sided perceptions in and through the dialogical movement. In this sense a dialogical process is a process of self-understanding.

It is language that constitutes the locus of the unity or the belongingness of the subject and the object. Commenting upon Gadamer's idea of belongingness, Weinsheimer writes:

For Gadamer, language is the locus of belonging in that it is the place where subject and object, thought and world meet — or, more precisely, where they are at home together prior to being split asunder by conscious reflection. Language presents the primordial whole. Yet the problem remains that in fact language is finite. It does not develop teleologically by gravitating toward a pre-given order of things as it would appear to an infinite mind; rather, it goes its own way. If language is not governed by an eternal order, however, no more is it subject to human will, for language is not a tool of thought that could be constructed or replaced at will. Even if thought is not the tool of language either, yet so intimately are they related that the historical specificity of language reflects that of the men who speak them (1985, p. 249).

Granted that Gadamer's idea of the hermeneutic conversation between the interpreter and the interpreted object is structured by the dialectic of question and answer, the possibility of this dialectic requires that the hermeneutic object be conceived as a participant of a hermeneutic situation. It would have to be something like a conscious being, as it were, a "thou" capable of eliciting responses and questions in a dialectical encounter. Thus, Gadamer cites the text as an example of such a hermeneutic object. A text is a hermeneutic object only in so far as it is understood to be a response to some question. So the text has its own voice and its own message to convey, but the message or

magnifies the very fact of our cultural belongingness. That we should hear what the other person says is not only a requirement of a genuine participation but also of our own understanding. It is for this reason that Gadamer considers it to be obligatory to understand the tradition transmitted to us as a "thou", a living being, in order to make sense of our own historicity.

Besides considering dialogue as a necessity, Gadamer makes an important ontological claim about the dialogical or communicative structure of understanding. We are essentially participative or interactive beings in the on-going conversation of mankind. The communality of meaning which underlies our socio-cultural existence is transmitted to us by the past. So, the fact that we are historically situated beings is a fact about our participative or dialogical nature. In Gadamer's words:

Language is the real medium of human being, if we only see it in the realm that it alone fills out, the realm of human being-together, the realm of common understanding, of ever-replenished common agreement - a realm as indispensable to human life as the air we breathe (1976, p. 68).

The point about the communality of meaning which underlies the dialogical model of understanding is, however, not a belief in the universal oneness of mankind. Rather, it is an ontological claim — a claim about the fundamentality of communicative understanding. What unites the "I" and the "thou", despite their distinctive identities, is the idea of our belonging to the "communality of thought". That we live in a society, follow customs and practices, take decisions keeping in view the welfare of all, are some undeniable facts of our communal life. For

Gadamer understanding is a natural feature of our socio-cultural life. The ontological claim about understanding, however, is not a claim about our being able to grasp the other person completely. Rather, it signifies that the other is not a total stranger to us. For Gadamer there is nothing which is not understandable. Nevertheless, an important feature of his commensurability thesis is the underlying dialectic between the familiar and unfamiliar, identity and difference, present and past. In Gadamer's own words:

Difference exists within identity. Otherwise, identity would not be identity. Thought contains deferral and distance. Otherwise, thought would not be thought (1989, p. 125).

Gadamer takes this tension to be the essence of all understanding. Thus, he never says that the temporal distance between the past and the present, between the familiar and the alien, needs to be bridged if understanding at all is to be possible. Understanding, for him, does not mean overcoming the distance, but listening to the claims made by the other. And, surely, this communicative link between I and thou survives on the shareability of common thoughts and one's natural respect for the other. And the underlying communicative pattern of human thoughts and beliefs conditions our self-disclosure. For Gadamer, the idea of self-understanding is neither a complete disclosure nor an intuitive realization in some irreducible subjective privacy. Self-understanding presupposes a dialogue between I and thou set against the background of common understanding. Gadamer explains:

The formulation of "I" and "thou" already betrays an enormous alienation. There is nothing like an "I" and "thou" at all—there is neither the I nor the thou as isolated, substantial realities. I may say "thou" and I

may refer to myself over against a thou, but a common understanding [*verständigung*] always precedes these situations. We all know that to say "thou" to someone presupposes a deep common accord (*tiefes Einverständnis*) (1976, p. 7).

To sum up, the dialogical mode is a mode of being. Our identity is a "communicative" identity, which can also be characterized as "dialogical" identity in so far as a dialogue is an event of communication. The inseparable "I-thou" relationship is the internal subjective correlate of the external objective phenomenon of a communicative or dialogical event. The individual's existential identity has its necessary locus in the dialogical nexus of human communication. The unity of the individual self is a synthetic unity in the sense that the self partakes of the conversational unity of mankind. It is in this sense that the self can be said to have a dialogical constitution and identity. Calvin O. Schrag joins hands with Gadamer on the project of communicative understanding which restores the notion of human subjectivity into an essentially interactive, life-world. He writes:

The subject implicated by his discourse and action in the hermeneutical space of communicative praxis is a subject decentered and decentralized, bearing the inscriptions of a language community and a community of social practices as it undergoes the odyssey of self and social formation. No longer a monarchical self that somehow has its seat of authority, its "authorship" within itself — in the private sense of prescriptions and its private thoughts — the decentralized subject is more like what James Ogilvy has characterised as a "heterarchical self" — a self authorised and constituted by the multiplicity of its responses and profiles within a public and historical world (Schrag, 1985, p. 31).

4.2 Ricoeur's Theory of Narrative Understanding

The problem of narrative understanding can be rightly appreciated within the context of the hermeneutics of historical consciousness. The claim about the narrative understanding of life as a possible hermeneutic mode is built upon the assumption that understanding is essentially historically conditioned. The entire history of hermeneutic philosophy from Dilthey onwards shows fidelity to this notion. Thus, in Dilthey, we find the idea of the "objective mind", which is a product of history, and which is not to be confused with the Hegelian Absolute Mind, understood as the only source of understanding.¹ Heidegger speaks against the subject-object dichotomy. His most celebrated phrase "being-in-the-world" enunciates the historical situatedness of understanding; and this conception of understanding reaches its climax in Gadamer. Not only does Gadamer stringently reject the conception of presuppositionless knowledge; he also argues in favour of the positive roles of "authority" and "tradition". And the same conception echoes, on a slightly different note, in Ricoeur's idea that time can be grasped only from the existential-historical standpoint and that this understanding of time is symbolically mediated.

What underlies this urge for the historicity of understanding throughout the history of hermeneutic philosophy is the strong resistance against Hegel's idea of absolute knowledge

¹ However, we have seen in Gadamer's critique of Dilthey (see the section 4 of chapter 1) that despite Dilthey's right move towards defending the historicity of understanding, the notion of the "objective mind" still espouses the ideal of scientific objectivity.

attained through "total mediation". Such a rational and perfect mediation is beyond the power of the human-historical mind.

Interestingly, however, it is this idea of mediation that constitutes the focal point of the claim that understanding is historically situated. What mediates understanding is not some absolute external principle, but our own symbolically constituted world. The idea of mediation, we must note, is not taken as a means to achieve some goal. Symbolic mediation is not something external to the process of understanding in the way Hegelian history is. There is nothing like a total self-realization outside the historical process. It is only in and through the mediation of the meaning-impregnated world that understanding takes place. The denial of a complete mediation is the denial of an absolute self-realization. To put it differently, the claim about the historicity of understanding negates self-transparency.

In the beginning of the *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Ricoeur states:

Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience (1983, p. 3).

It is with this major presupposition that "time" and "narrative" condition each other that Ricoeur's voluminous work *Time and Narrative* begins. He develops a theory of narrative understanding in terms of which the relation between time and narrative is explained. Apart from providing a solution to the Augustinian problems of time, Ricoeur develops this theory of narrative understanding into a theory of self-understanding. At

this point it would be right to discuss the aporias of time which Augustine confronts and for which Ricoeur proposes a narrative solution.

4.2.1 Ricoeur's Narrative Solution to Augustinian

Problems of Time

Augustine confronts numerous enigmas regarding time when he asks, "how do we measure time?" The immediate problem he faces is how to define time existentially or ontologically. For what can be measured must exist in some way. Considering our commonplace judgement about time-consciousness, Augustine wishes to protect this common sense belief about time-consciousness against any sort of sceptical claim. Thus, drawing upon our common experiences of "short time" and "long time", he judges that it is the past which lengthens and the future which shortens. The conclusion which he jumps to is that only the past and the future can be measured. But, again the problem is: "how can anything which does not exist be long or short?" The problem is how the past and the future, which are not in the present, can be measured. In other words, it is a problem of reconciling the positive verbs "to be" or "to exist" with the negative terms "no longer" and "not-yet".

Despite these enigmas, Augustine is not ready to give up our ordinary belief in time, namely that our experiences are in time and we recount and make predictions about them. These temporal qualities seem to be too obvious to be subject to any sceptical challenge. But, if these temporal qualities imply the existence of the past and the future, the question arises: "where do they exist?" The problem now is that of finding out their locations.

Augustine believes that this measured space for the past and the future is nothing but the soul, the human mind, where they exist with the temporal qualities of narration and prediction respectively. To be situated in the soul means that the impression-signs (memory) and the image-signs (expectation) — that is, both the past and the future — appear in the present. In other words, it is only in the present that the memory of times past is evoked and the expectation of the future visualized. Thus in a sense the present mediates between the past and the future, which in turn gives rise to the idea of the three-fold present: the present of the past (memory), the present of the present (attention) and the present of the future (expectation). This notion of the three-fold present solves the initial ontological problem. Since the past and the future exist in the present, the present signifies a quasi-spatiality — a measurable space for the measurement of time.

The three-fold present which puts an end to the ontological problem, however, gives rise to another paradox which Augustine terms *distentio animi* and *intentio*. The paradox is between "distention" and "intention" which define the extension and intention of the soul respectively. The soul experiences distention or dissonance when it attends to itself in the present moment. It is in the most authentic moment of "attending" to the mind or "engaging-in-itself", that the soul experiences dispersals of time — namely attention, memory and expectation. Thus, the notion of the three-fold present, which seems to resolve the earlier paradox by uniting the apparently dissociated temporal

moments, now takes the shape of a new paradox. The paradox arises due to the idea of the present as "passing away" which is related to the past and the future in both active and passive senses. Augustine arrives at this notion only after rejecting the idea of temporal linearisation. The three temporal modalities are understood as related to one another through the mode of "transition" or "passing away" — the present relegating the future into the past. This transition period, even as it holds the three modalities of time together, gives rise to a dissonance among them. Augustine's example of reciting a verse shows that the very conscious act of recitation is related to the passivity of the past and the future at the same time. The portion of the verse which is being recited and that which is not are passively related to the conscious act of reciting a verse. Ricoeur explains:

It is not only these three acts that do not coincide, but also the activity and passivity which oppose one another, to say nothing of the discordance between the two passivities, the one related to the expectation, the other to the memory. Therefore, the more the mind makes itself *intentio*, the more it suffers *distentio* (1983, p. 21).

An important point about Augustine's analysis deserves special attention here. Apart from the paradox of *distentio animi*, Augustine is faced with the following problems: how to reconcile the phenomenological time of the soul, which is dispersed time, with the unified cosmological time? To put it differently, the problem is that of reconciling the multiple, fractured time with the unified time where the past, the present and the future co-exist. As a matter of fact, this problem constitutes the very heart of Augustine's exploratory enterprise. Ricoeur notices that

this paradox gets intensified when Augustine takes eternity to be the solution to this problem. We must note that eternity for him is not mere eternal time but is also attributed to God, the luminous being in whose light and love human beings are able to hold time firmly. This reference to the eternal being as a solution to the paradox of time is an expression of his lamenting over the sheer finitude of human existence. And Augustine believes that it is only with the love of eternity that human beings can transcend their finitude and become one with time. Ricoeur explains, in the following passage, how time is contrasted with eternity by analysing Augustine's own proclamations:

When Augustine derides the frivolousness of those who attribute a new will to God at the moment of creation, and when he contrasts the way "their thoughts still twist and turn" to the "steady" mind of the one who listens to the Word (11:13), he refers to the steadiness, which is similar to that of the eternal present, only to reiterate the difference between time and eternity: "But if only their minds could be seized and held steady, they would be still for awhile and, for that short moment, they would glimpse the splendour of eternity which is forever still. They would contrast it with time, which is never still, and see that it is not comparable". By opening the distance, proximity also reiterates the limiting function of eternity in relation to time: "If only men's minds could be seized and held still! They would see how eternity, in which there is neither past nor future, determines both past and future time" (1983, pp. 29-30).

Ricoeur contends that Augustine is mistaken in believing that time — the human time — is a total disorder, full of contingencies, whereas eternity is a complete permanence. Temporality, for Ricoeur, is never a complete disorder. According to him, the problem of time cannot be solved by abolishing it, but by deepening it. The actual help, in this regard, is believed to come from the idea of configuration — a temporal modality — and

not from eternity. In his words, "chronology - or chronography - does not have just one contrary, the achronology of laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself" (1983, p. 30).

Ricoeur also observes that Augustine's view of time reflects a strong inclination to understand time purely phenomenologically. Referring to Augustine's own inquiry which has an argumentative structure, Ricoeur argues that there is nothing like a pure phenomenology of time. Time is not something which can be grasped phenomenologically. He also criticises Aristotle's conception of the "objective time". For time is always grounded in the (ontological) being-in-the-world. It is Dasein's existential mode which constitutes the ontological grounding for the phenomenology of time. On Heideggerian ground, Ricoeur paves his way to construct the mediating point between the aporetics of time and what he calls the poetics of narrative.

Having ruled out the possibility of a pure phenomenology of time, Ricoeur proceeds to deal with the Augustinian problem of temporal dissonance. In dealing with the problem he draws crucial help from Aristotle's theory of narrative. Ricoeur's independent reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which offers an elaborate theoretical account of narrative as a literary-linguistic genre, furnishes him with sufficient insights to tackle the problem of time. Although Aristotle recognizes temporality as one of the features of narrative, he does not pay due heed towards the articulation of the relation between time and narrative. And Ricoeur finds this lacuna in Aristotle to his advantage. He then

exploits this opportunity to establish a link between the two concepts, i.e. narrative and time.

Of the several elements of narrative that Aristotle talks about, the element of "plot" emerges as a major concept. A plot in a narrative is that element which provides unity to it. Despite the fact that a narrative takes several turns and often embodies numerous narrative voices, it still is a unified whole. The plot renders unity and meaningfulness to the otherwise diverse contents of a narrative. A narrative discourse is a complete discourse; it has a beginning, a middle and an end. Thus, Aristotle defines plot, which he calls *muthos*, as "an organization of events". The notable point about Aristotle's definition is that a plot is not an objective phenomenon in a narrative which can be structurally explained. It is rather an act of composition — an act of configuring the disparate and heterogeneous elements into a unified whole. The underlying unity in a narrative, thus, has a dynamism which maintains a coherent temporal order within the text. Indeed, it is in virtue of the plot that a narrative displays as well as sustains a dialectic between the temporal succession of events and episodes and a meaningful order they are textured into. In view of this dynamicity of configuration, Ricoeur prefers the terms "emplotment" to plot.

The notion of a plot or *muthos* does not appear as an isolated notion in Aristotle. It has a co-concept which he calls *mimesis*. Mimesis signifies an act of imitation or representation. Imitation here does not mean the imitation of Ideas in the Platonic sense. The word "mimesis" does not stand for image at

all. By mimesis Aristotle means "imitation of actions". Ricoeur explains Aristotle's idea of mimesis as follows: "imitating or representing is a mimetic activity inasmuch as it produces something, namely, the organization of events by emplotment" (1983, p. 34). Mimesis thus is not a mere mirroring of events but also that of organizing them.

The co-conceptuality of *mimesis* and *muthos* serves an important theoretical purpose. Since *muthos* is taken as co-conceptual with mimesis, the latter does not just mean an imitation or copy of something, but also signifies an act of organizing creatively what it mirrors. Similarly, in as much as mimesis is co-conceptual with *muthos*, the latter can no longer be taken to be merely a fictive act of organization, but also as the representation of something actual about human existence.

The immanent reciprocity between *muthos* and mimesis is of extreme importance to Ricoeur. On the basis of this he develops a full-fledged theory of what he calls mimetic circularity. This theory brings to light the circularity between time and narrative which, in turn, solves the paradoxes of time. The circularity is between the three strands of mimetic relations, namely prefiguration (mimesis 1), configuration (mimesis 2) and refiguration (mimesis 3).

Configuration, which constitutes the central feature of the three-fold mimesis, performs a mediating function in relation to the other two elements. For Aristotle, a narrative imitates human actions and sufferings. A narrative discourse is about lived-reality. Exploiting this Aristotelian idea, Ricoeur

maintains that the narrative account is not just an errant succession of events and episodes, but it inherently possesses a narrative quality, which he terms configuration. In other words, in being a narrative of events and episodes of an otherwise disparate order, there emerges a configuration that portrays a life, a meaningful order of lived-temporality. But what is configured, that is the pre-narrative life-content, is not something originally non-narrative in character, upon which then a narrative configuration is imposed externally. Rather the pre-narrative life-content is intrinsically narrative, or immanently narrative, and this immanent narrative is articulated in a narrative text or discourse, whereby the configuration of life is rendered apparent. Hence what is configured (mimesis 2) is already pre-figured (mimesis 1). It also means that the pre-figured life-content is inherently amenable to mimetic portrayal. The lived-temporality is thus to be understood as characterized by the mimesis of pre-figuration as much as it is to be understood as the mimesis of configuration.

The overall mimetic character of lived-temporality has its third and last feature which is termed "refiguration". While the prefigured immanent narrative structure is made apparent in the articulated act of narrative configuration, this articulation of lived-reality or lived-temporality is then made to refigure in reflective consciousness (of the reader or appreciator), whereby the narrative content becomes an object of understanding or appreciation. Thus, the three-fold or three-staged mimetic act completes the circle.

This three-staged circular structure of mimesis indeed has Heideggerian overtones. Interestingly, Vanhoozer argues that Ricoeur's mimetic circularity is an extrapolation of the hermeneutic circularity that figures in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He writes:

Heidegger defines interpretation as the 'working out of possibilities projected in understanding'. Ricoeur's three-fold *Mimesis* bears a striking resemblance to this Heideggerian notion: *Mimesis I* corresponds to Heidegger's pre-understanding, *Mimesis II* to the projection of possibilities, and *Mimesis III* to the appropriation of these possibilities 'understandingly'. According to Ricoeur, the three 'moments' of *Mimesis* mediate Time and Telling: '*We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time*'. Ricoeur has thus recreated on the narrative level the whole process of Heideggerian interpretation (Vanhoozer, 1991, pp. 50-51).

At this point it would be right to examine Ricoeur's defense against two possible objections that he anticipates to his theory of mimetic circularity: namely violence of interpretation and redundancy of configuration. For it seems to us that this examination will not only shed light on the nature and significance of the circularity in question, but will also provide insights into the idea of narrative identity Ricoeur eventually develops.

The first objection against mimetic activity might be that, because of the "as-if" character which is intrinsic to the activity of configuration, mimesis would inevitably misrepresent reality or lived-temporality. In other words, mimesis might be held guilty of interpretative colouring upon the lived-reality that is represented, whereby the primordial temporal dissonance of lived-reality would be concealed behind the veneer

of order or concordance resulting from the configuring act. But Ricoeur maintains that this objection would be wholly a matter of misunderstanding the "as-if" character of mimetic configuration, which is an activity of the creative imagination.² Although creative imagination does enter into the act of configuring lived-temporality and thereby assist in the articulation of a meaningful whole, this imaginative intervention does not amount to putting an artificial layer of concordance, or order of meaning, upon the original plane of discordant lived-time. For the discordant temporality of primordial existence is already amenable to narrative configuration; it is, as discussed earlier, immanently narrative. And to bring out the immanent, latent order to the surface of consciousness, creative intervention of the imagination is required. Thus, narrative configuration is a creative act without being guilty of mimetic infidelity.

²Ricoeur builds the idea of "creative imagination" upon the Kantian idea of productive imagination, but gives it a literary or verbal twist. In Kant, the relation between understanding and sensibility is explained through the mediation of the term "productive imagination". Productive imagination (which is not to be confused with the reproduction of the images of the object) produces "schemas" which relate the categories or concepts with the objects of experiences. The connection between the categorial and the phenomenal realms is made possible by the schema because it shares the feature of being "in time" with the objects of experiences. For each category there is a schema. Thus, the category "reality" has its schema "being in time", "substance" "permanence through time" and so on.

In Ricoeur, narrative has the same function as that of a schema. It is a form of intelligibility which renders the otherwise dispersed human temporality meaningful. It figures or refigures human time in fictive or historical discourse. In Ricoeur's words: "Emplotment, too, engenders a mixed intelligibility between what has been called the point, theme, or thought of a story, and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes, and changes of fortune that make up the denouement. In this way, we may speak of a schematism of the narrative function" (1983, p. 68).

The narrative function is also cognitively explanatory. The cognitive power of narrative is explained by Ricoeur by way of grafting the notion of narrative onto that of metaphor. The function of metaphor, he claims, is that of semantic innovation through "impertinent predication". Semantic innovation is the generation of new meanings — meanings that cannot otherwise be visible at the literal, non-metaphorical level of "pertinent predication". Metaphorical predication appears impertinent only from the standpoint of literal semantics. But once the limitations of the scope of literal semantics is transcended — which is what is intended in taking recourse to metaphors — the unusual and innovative predication strikes as quite appropriate and a new meaning dawns in the threshold of understanding. The "metaphorical twist" is a semantic twist, a semantic reconstruction, or reorganization, which is evidently a work of creative imagination.

It is the innovative organizational feature of metaphor that makes it analogous to the nature of narrative configuration. For in a narrative configuration also, in as much as the *muthos* element is involved in it, involves the organization of heterogeneous elements of lived-temporality into a coherent, meaningful whole. And just as the semantic innovation resulting from a metaphorical twist is not the superimposition of meaning upon something — if it were it would be a twist of betrayal of reality — but a creative enhancement of the scope of meaning through the attribution of impertinent properties to objects, so also the narrative configuration of lived-temporality is no

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betrayal of the primordial reality of lived-time, but a creative articulation of the incoherent meaningfulness and the cognitive possibilities all buried (prefigured) in the desultory array of human time. Ricoeur makes a striking point of anthropological significance when he points out that the mimetic act of narrative configuration is expressive of mankind's deep "nostalgia for order" or, at worse, the "horror of disorder" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 72).³

Although concordance through the narrative act is required to be brought about in order to make sense of the primordial temporal dissonance of lived-reality, this constructive act is itself dependent in a certain way on temporal dissonance. Concordance, which is a condition for order and meaning, is itself dependent on discordance. For Ricoeur it is the temporal order which generates the sense of winning over discordance through concordance. Thus, concordance is not only necessitated, but is also determined, to some extent, by temporal dissonance, which in no case is a complete disorder. Drawing our attention to Augustine's analysis, Ricoeur says that *distentio* (dispersals of the soul) is experienced only in *intentio*. That is to say, when the mind engages itself to itself, it experiences attention, memory and expectation all at once. These two features are not incompatible, for *distentio animi* presupposes *intentio* and *vice-versa*.

³Anthony Kerby (1988) sees a therapeutic value in a narrative discourse. For him, the need for a narrative composition of one's history stretching from life to death is as acute in the case of a normal person as it is in the case of a patient suffering from a mental disorder. A narrative offered to a patient, drawn out of his discontinuous and fragmented structure of life, helps him articulate the meaning of his life. A narrative articulation is thus required; for it generates the sense of identity.

It is configuration which reconciles discordance with concordance. Ricoeur therefore talks about "discordant concordance" and "concordant discordance" (1991, p. 22). This feature reflects a structural similarity between metaphor and narrative. Just as a metaphor subsumes incoherence and yet produces something meaningful, so also, according to Ricoeur, a narrative configuration generates a "unified whole" by assembling heterogeneous elements in a meaningful pattern. So for him discordance and concordance are not contraries; rather, they are dialectically related. The dialectical relation between discordance and concordance rules out the belief that time is a complete disorder and narrative a complete order. Ricoeur writes:

As we saw with Augustine, *distentio* and *intentio* mutually confront each other at the heart of our most authentic experience. We must preserve the paradox of time from the leveling out brought about by reducing it to simple discordance.... The consonance characteristic of narrative which we are tempted to oppose in a nondialectic fashion to the dissonance of our temporal experience, must itself also be tempered. Emplotment is never the simple triumph of "order" (1983, pp. 72-73).

Turning to the charge of redundancy, Ricoeur reiterates that concordance constitutes a dialectic counterpart of the experience of temporality. He argues that it is because life has some implicit order, some immanent narrative structure, no matter how loosely textured it may be; that it is possible to configure or refigure it. This pre-narrative structure of human existence not only makes it possible to remould life, but it also prevents life from becoming a total chaos. Ricoeur argues that human actions, which are reconstituted by a narrative discourse, are already

embedded in some meaningful form.⁴ In contrast to mere physical movements, they are couched in a network of aims, means, circumstances etc. Being goal-directed behaviours, they embody meaningfulness.

Besides this rational purposive character, actions derive meaning from the culturally defined practices and norms. It is this underlying social pattern that justifies certain actions and disapproves of certain others. More than their symbolic constitution, actions are grounded in temporality, to borrow Heideggerian terminology. We do experience the temporality of our day-to-day events and episodes in a narrative bent of mind. The thread of life is a narrative one. Thus it is because life has an intrinsic narrative pattern that we tell stories about ourselves as well as others. The act of telling a story is nothing but the articulation of the loosely configured lived-stories. The story told about one's life actually emerges out of the storage of unpatterned stories. As Kerby writes:

Narrativity is a principle of intelligibility and not simply a vehicle for a pre-given and evident senses.... the given (human actions, transactions, and so on) has a quasi-narrative status that has yet to be brought to explicit narrative understanding. The latter process, however, will not tolerate a description in terms of a simplistic dichotomy of form and content. Narrative expression is not a mere communication of information or

⁴Dilthey also holds a similar view. According to him, a meaningful pattern of life would be unattainable, if the parts out of which it is constructed were utterly meaningless. In his words: "we are looking for the kind of connection which is inherent in life itself, and we are looking for it in the individual events. In each of these which contributes to the pattern something of the meaning of life must be contained; otherwise it could not arise from their inter-connection" (Rickman's, *Selected Writings*, 1976, pp. 237-38).

data, but is a sense-giving and synthetic activity (1988, p. 239).

The question which arises here is, why is narrative rendering at all desirable when life itself is textured in story-forms? Although Ricoeur believes that a story grows out of stories he still defines a story as a "story told" or "story recounted". For him the transition from the untold and repressed stories to the story told is an expression of a "quest for identity". In following the story of one's life a person appropriates his identity. Ricoeur contends:

The individual can be said to be tangled up in stories which happen to him before any story is recounted. The entanglement then appears as the pre-history of the story told, the beginning of which is chosen by the narrator. The pre-history of the story is what connects it up to a vaster whole and gives it a background. This background is made up of living imbrication of all lived stories. The stories that are told must then be made to emerge out of the background. As they emerge the implied subject also emerges (1991, p. 30).

The emergence of self-identity in the form of narrative identity is a result of the actual story which a person configures out of discrete and heterogeneous experiences and episodes of life. All that lies fragmented receives a meaningful cohesive form through the mediation of narrative. Ricoeur again says:

This narrative interpretation implies that a life story proceeds from untold and repressed stories in the direction of actual stories the subject can take up and hold as constitutive of his personal identity. It is the quest for this personal identity that assures the continuity between the potential or inchoate story and the actual story we assume responsibility for (1983, p. 74).

The movement towards the narrative interpretation of life from the pre-narrative, incoherent state is manifestive of the deepest desire of mankind to achieve stability against the fluidity of time. If the understanding of human time is narrative, and narrative is primarily linguistic, then the narrative understanding of time is essentially linguistic. He thus thinks in a way contrary to Augustine's contention that language-transcendent eternity is the only way human time can be rescued from being torn asunder. Ricoeur rather urges that this gap between sheer dispersals and the unified time under the divine gaze needs to be bridged. And he believes that the discordance-concordance dialectic of emplotment functions as a mediating point between phenomenological time and cosmological time.

If we now look back at Augustine's aporetics of time through Ricoeur, we find that the issue of identity nowhere figures in Augustine. And a quick glance at Aristotle's theory of narrative also makes it clear that identity is not a problem for him either. However, the general framework within which Ricoeur sets his discussion is constructed mainly with two concepts, namely, discordance and concordance. While it is discordance which figures predominantly in Augustine, it is concordance that gains conceptual ascendancy in Aristotle. In the framework of a new theory Ricoeur is able to adjust these two concepts into a new dialectical nexus.

Discordance is problematic in Augustine because it does not go along with the idea of "wholeness", "unity" or "oneness". His

example of reciting a verse explicitly brings out this incongruity between the two concepts. What he says is that the act of reciting a poem is a movement that traverses the space of expectation, attention and memory. There seems to be something in the act of recitation because of the intention of the speaker, whereby the whole poem exists in his mind, and the very act is a movement from the space of expectation to the space of memory through the present. The intention of reciting a poem does not yield any division of spaces. But the act of recitation does involve three temporal modalities of action, and there also appears to be a contradiction between the passivity of memory and the activity of expectation. The point is that the more the soul attends to itself, the more it suffers from distention. Ricoeur argues that this is true not just in the case of reciting a psalm, but in the case of the entire history of mankind. And surprisingly this idea is cherished by Augustine himself. Ricoeur explains:

The fragile example of the *canticus* recited by heart suddenly becomes, toward the end of the inquiry, a powerful paradigm for other *actiones* in which, through engaging itself, the soul suffers distention: "what is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and each syllable. It is true of any longer action [*in actione longiore*] in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions [*actiones*] are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part" (28 : 38). The entire province of narrative is laid out here in its potentiality, from the single poem, to the story of an entire life, to universal history (1983, p. 22).

Now what follows from Augustine's realization at the end is that the whole problem of time is couched in the dialectic of whole and parts, order and disorder. The dialectic that Ricoeur

shows between narrative and time, in the sense that a narrative provides an order to the dispersed time, can easily be seen in Augustine. A similar tension between narrative and time is found in Aristotle. In Aristotle, though temporality is least discussed, the dynamicity of a narrative discourse is never overlooked.

4.2.2 Narrative Identity

It is against this background of the two dialectically related concepts of "time" and "narrative" that Ricoeur introduces the issue of narrative identity. Augustine's problem of reconciling multiple, fractured time with the unilateral time makes sense only from the standpoint of the finitude of human existence. If Augustine turns towards eternity in search of a solution to the aporetics of time, he does so because he realizes the finitude of human-historical existence. One can clearly see through his discussion on time and eternity an intense desire to move towards the unity or oneness, a desperate search for order and consonance. In Aristotle, on the other hand, consonance prevails through the narrative act over dispersals brought about by temporal succession. But, in essence, both Augustinian and Aristotelian discourses drive home a single idea — the idea of unity and stability. While one aspires towards it, the other affirms its necessity.

It is this desire for order, unity and stability that constitutes the very essence of the self and of self-understanding. And attaining self-understanding is a matter of understanding oneself in the narrative mode as having

narrative identity. However, we must note here that the stability brought about by narrative ordering is intrinsically dynamic. For it is an organized temporal structure. Hence it must be clearly contrasted with the static identity of a metaphysical substance that persists through temporal changes.

Ricoeur is careful to distinguish the idea of narrative identity from the idea of the identity of some enduring substance. In his paper "Narrative Identity" he extrapolates two senses of the term "identity", namely, sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*), and alleges that adequate attention has not been paid to this distinction by most thinkers in the history of Western philosophy. Indeed, the conflation of the one sense with the other is held to be responsible for the problems of personal identity raised in contemporary philosophy. Ricoeur discusses several senses in which the idea of "sameness" is understood. First, there is sameness in the numerical sense, where the two occurrences of a thing do not constitute two different things but one and the same thing. Second, there is sameness in the sense of extreme resemblance, where the two objects are inter-substitutable; third, there is sameness in the sense of continuity, whereby we say that an object continues to remain the same from its origin to its end. He takes the third sense of identity to be crucial. The idea of the uninterrupted continuity of the same thing actually gives rise to the fourth sense of identity which Ricoeur terms "permanence in time".

This sense of identity as permanence in time implies the belief in the existence of an immutable substance. Ricoeur

maintains that whenever we speak about "selfhood" we unconsciously refer to something that possesses its identity in the fourth sense of identity, that is in the sense of an immutable self that persists through temporal change. But, according to Ricoeur, this is an unwarranted conflation of *ipse* with *idem*, of identity-as-selfhood with identity-as-sameness. These two are in no way one and the same thing, and not to realize this is to fail to see any way out of the recurrent problems of personal identity witnessed in contemporary philosophy.

When we confront the question of sameness-identity, the question we ask is the "whatness" of the object. We then answer it by predicating of the object properties that are deemed essential to it. On the other hand, the question of identity-as-selfhood, or self-identity, is not that of what the self is, but of *who* it is — e.g. the human agent or subject who is responsible for his own acts. The identity of the self or agent consists not so much in its having this or that property as in being able to relate itself to its own being. Ricoeur alludes to Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* — a being whose ontological essence is that of questioning its own being. Thus the problem of self-identity or selfhood cannot be rightly understood without appreciating the self-questioning existential character of the self. In contrast, the problem of identity as sameness concerns only what Heidegger calls ready-to-hand and present-at-hand entities.

CHAPTER V

AN ASSESSMENT OF HERMENEUTICS *VIS-A-VIS* DECONSTRUCTION

5.1 Against the "Metaphysics of Presence"

The two independently developed theories of self-understanding — the dialogical and the narrative — face a serious threat when their Heideggerian foundation is questioned by Derrida. Although Derrida develops Heidegger's programme of the destruction of metaphysics in more radical terms, he also points out certain intrinsic aberrations in Heidegger's account. Heidegger's effort to bring an end to metaphysics itself turns out to be metaphysical at the end. Instead of overthrowing the "metaphysics of presence", Heidegger nurtures this idea in his entire project. Derrida claims that Heidegger is never safely away from the metaphysical interpretation of Being. He also argues that "Being" and "Time" are both metaphysical notions as such and, in any case, it is not possible to reject metaphysics altogether. No matter how hard one tries, any rejection of a metaphysical concept is not itself completely free from metaphysical contents (Derrida, 1978, pp. 280-281). That is, a critique of metaphysics is finally metaphysical in essence. And if one goes outside and attacks it, one would be entering into an entirely different discourse and then metaphysics would enjoy its invincible sovereignty. In either case, it is difficult to avoid metaphysics. This is the major paradox about any such intellectual endeavour.

Derrida does not claim to eradicate metaphysics completely. His deconstruction aims at presenting paradoxes, aporias, and enigmas surviving in the whole history of philosophy. In this

sense, deconstruction is an internal critique of philosophy. Even while deconstruction is destructive or subversive by temperament, its positive value lies in its reflective strategies. It reflects upon philosophy in so far as philosophy claims itself to be the paradigmatically reflective enterprise. Derrida's deconstruction, in this sense, is a meta-reflective or meta-critical enterprise.

Deconstruction takes a subversive stand against all unexamined privileged concepts in philosophy. The idea of the "metaphysics of presence" becomes the central target of Derrida's deconstructive strategy. As a matter of fact, Derrida identifies the entire philosophical discourse with that of traditional metaphysics. Thus the whole edifice of philosophy becomes a victim of his subversive gaze. For him, not only does this idea of the metaphysics of presence assert its dominance within the philosophical discourse, it also makes philosophy the most privileged and special discipline in comparison with others. What distinguishes philosophy from other types of discourses is its claim to provide us with a "rational and foundational discourse". The distinctive, transparent knowledge of philosophy is nothing but the knowledge of "Being" or "consciousness" or "Being as *presence*", as Derrida puts it (1978, p. 279). That which transcends all bounds of temporal changes asserts its identity, its stability or permanence. Thus, philosophy claims to give us a distinctive knowledge of that fixed and fundamental point which endures in time. Knowledge of this enduring substance is marked by its "presence" — its uninterrupted immediate grasp. To put it

differently, consciousness of this metaphysical being is distinguished by its purity, its immediacy, its presence. Derrida calls this rationalistic discourse the logocentric view of philosophy.

Now, what is being questioned in deconstruction is the belief in the possibility of an uninterrupted immediate knowledge of being. Derrida points out that the primacy of the notion of "presence" survives on the distinction between "speech" and "writing". This distinction is again Platonic. Speech or verbal language is regarded as primary in relation to writing in Plato. Speech, a private monologue, signifies the presence of being, the presence of oneself. In speech one hears oneself, finds oneself in one's own immediacy. This immediacy, however, is interrupted in the transition from the verbal to the written. It is because of this that writing is undermined by Plato. However, writing, for him, is both a cure and a poison. It is a cure in that it helps remembering, or rather reduces the burden of memory. Writing in this sense is a secure storage. But at the same time writing is poisonous, for it kills one's capacity to memorise things in one's soul. It shows distrust in memory and thereby distanciates the soul from its presence. Writing asks us to take refuge in an "outside" realm and, in this sense, it is an interruption, a threat to one's identity.

Derrida observes that distinctions such as speech/writing, inside/outside, identity/difference and the assessment of their values abound the history of philosophy. His deconstructive project questions precisely these dichotomous relationships and

the undue privilege given to one term over the other. The privileged positions of "speech" and "identity" over "writing" and "difference" are superfluous ones, according to him. But in questioning the primacy of these concepts, Derrida certainly does not attempt to inverse the equations, that is, making "writing" or "difference" primary in relation to their respective counterparts. Instead, he questions the very existence of these dichotomies. He even claims that if philosophy enjoys the sovereign position, it is able to do so only by virtue of such arbitrary assignment of values. This privilege of evaluation enjoyed by philosophy is what Derrida puts to question.

Derrida examines the speech/writing distinction so as to get to the underlying theme. And he does so within the purview of his theory of sign which is founded on Saussure's structuralism. Derrida's theory poses a threat to logocentrism and to what he terms phonocentrism. He mounts his attack on logocentrism by first uncovering its linguistic underpinnings. He claims that the logocentric view of philosophy rests on the speech/writing distinction. The verbal signs or phonemes are considered superior than written physical marks in that they entail the immediacy of the self. The meaning-content or the intelligible core of the physical signs is present in one's consciousness. The belief in the uninterrupted self-presence in speech, onto which is grafted logocentrism — that is, the belief in the enduring presence of consciousness — is shattered because, as Derrida maintains, phonocentrism is a wrong and biased thesis. On the basis of Saussure's structuralism, Derrida argues that prior to any

question of the primacy of speech or, for that matter, writing, we must note that language fundamentally works upon what he calls the principle of *differance* (1986, p. 3). There is absolutely no fixed meaning in language; rather, there is a constant slippage, a ceaseless deferment of meaning right at the basic level. The idea of "constant slippage" over and above the speech/writing distinction defies the immediate accessibility of meaning to one's own consciousness.

Since meaning is not what we can lay our hands on, the frequently used concept of *differance* in Derrida's philosophy also escapes any definite meaning. As a matter of fact, Derrida admits unhesitatingly the absence of one particular meaning of the term *differance*.

Although the term *differance* does not have any fixed connotation, its special position and use in Derrida's framework makes it clear that it has a spatio-temporal structure. The feature of spatiality is that signs admit of a variety of combinations within the space of the language-system. This accounts for difference in meaning. The possibility of various interrelations of signs is precisely due to the absence of fixed meanings of signs.¹

¹At this point Derrida heavily relies on Saussure's structuralism. The fundamental idea of structuralism is that language, when it is not in use, is a system of interrelated signs. And signs acquire meaning only in various combinations. That is, they do not have meaning exclusively on their own. Structuralism is essentially a belief in opposition, in difference. The meaning of a sign is not what it upholds, but a matter of its relation to other signs.

On the other hand, the temporal feature of *différance* is suggested by its explication in terms of concepts like "delay", "deferment" and "slippage". For Derrida, there is no semantic certainty or stability. All that we have is an unsettling free play of interpretations. In explicating the temporal dimension, Derrida turns towards Husserl's *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. Husserl's thesis is that there is never an instant of "living present" which is not fabricated or organized within the retentional and protentional structure of time. In fact this networking of temporal modalities falls against Husserl's radical project of providing the "ultimate ground" for the experience of pure consciousness. Following Husserl, Derrida says that since there is a slippage back and forth, meaning is never immediately accessible to us. What is accessible to us is not the fixed meaning but the traces of the signs. The temporality of a present sign is such that it carries along the traces of the signs past. Thus, all that we have are the traces and never pure meanings. We can never succeed in catching up with the actual meanings of signs; we only follow the trail of marks left behind. Thus, there is an endless delay or deferment in the acquisition of meaning. Derrida explains:

The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense is deferred presence (1982, p. 9, emphasis added).

The non-fixity of meaning is mainly due to two reasons. First, no immediate knowledge of signs is accessible to us; for there are no fixed signifieds standing for signifiers. The meaningfulness of signs is rather a function of their interrelations. Since the whole gamut of concepts is always functional, we can never succeed in pointing out the single meaning of a sign as symbol. Every interpretation offers a new meaning, a new semantic position. Secondly, a signifier and a signified do not function on the same footing. They are marked by a distance — a gulf created by the corporeal character of signs, which signifieds do not possess. These two features, which together constitute the spatio-temporal dimensions of the term *differance*, account for the lack of identity and fixity of meaning.

The non-coincidence of the signifier and the signified and the non-availability of fixed meanings for signifiers together constitute a radical antithesis to the Platonic status of ideas or concepts as fixed universals situated in the transcendental realm. According to Derrida, the problem lies in the very nature of a signifier, which has not been seriously examined in the history of western metaphysics. He questions the "presence of meaning" by pointing to the "play of substitutions" which goes on at the very bedrock of language (Derrida, 1978, p. 289). For him there is no fixed and fundamental point available beneath the bedrock. There is no "centre" within the system of signs. All talks about the centre within a system have an essential paradoxical nature. That which we take as the centre survives paradoxically within the

system. For the fixed point which provides stability to the system remains cut off from the changes taking place at the surface level. Now, if it survives these semantic changes, it surely falls outside the system. Thus, it is within the system as well as outside it. Hence, Derrida claims, any search for a fixed and stable point is futile. In his words:

The Center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure — although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science — is contradictorily coherent (Derrida, 1978, p. 279).

One may try to defend hermeneutic philosophy, or for that matter any constructive theoretical programme, against deconstruction by developing a counter-critique of the latter. But this is not what we intend to do here, though we wish to speak in favour of the hermeneutic programmes of Gadamer and Ricoeur. Our strategy is to reveal the extent to which the hermeneutic notion of self-understanding, or interpretative consciousness, is sufficiently distanced from the traditional concept of the self as a substance, as rooted in the metaphysics of presence, which is the main target of deconstruction. Furthermore, it is to be seen whether the different ways in which the idea of hermeneutic consciousness is constructed and projected are broadly in conformity with the spirit and tenor of deconstruction, especially Derrida's idea of meaning as the endless "play of significations" (Derrida, 1978, p. 281). Our argument is that whatever account can be given on these two issues will determine the viability of

the hermeneutic view of self-understanding while granting the *prima facie* plausibility of deconstruction as a critique. This would also bypass the objections of deconstruction which may be placed against hermeneutics.

Since Derrida's theory of the endless "play of significations" overthrows the "metaphysics of presence", it may appear as though recourse to the notion of identity of whatever level or context would be otiose. But then this recourse is taken in no weak sense by philosophical hermeneutics, especially by Gadamer and Ricoeur. The possibility of hermeneutics, or even the meaningfulness of the idea of hermeneutic consciousness, would therefore seem to be seriously jeopardized in the wake of deconstruction.

Derrida poses a problem for hermeneutic philosophy because deconstruction is subversive to any theoretical system that employs the notion of the self as both the subject and the object of self-understanding or self-interpretation. If identity or presence is not a legitimate concept, then surely this concept of the self is illegitimate in that it necessarily implies identity as presence. It would therefore seem that the very idea of hermeneutic consciousness — an idea which definitely involves the self as the interpreter of the hermeneutic object or content — is liable to be deconstructed to the detriment of the philosophical programme of hermeneutics. Must, then, hermeneutic philosophy as conceived and expounded by Gadamar and Ricoeur ultimately succumb to Derrida's terminal critique?

In what follows we examine Derrida's possible objections against the hermeneutic theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur and put forward our arguments in defense of their theories.

5.2 In Defense of Gadamer

Derrida rejects Gadamer's thesis of the centrality of the "Universality of hermeneutics". The universal claim about interpretative understanding is essentially a claim about the communicative nature of understanding. Since understanding is linguistic in nature and communication is the primary feature of language, understanding is *ipso facto* communicative. And the universality of communicative understanding implies the communicative or dialogical character of human-historical existence. It is a belief in the conversational *essence* of mankind.

Derrida claims that Gadamer's theory of communicative understanding is posited on a more fundamental idea, that is the idea of the "good will". A successful communication with another person is possible only when the person expresses the will to participate as a dialogical partner. The other must also be given due respect and his view-points must be well-taken into consideration. Good will is thus shown to be a condition of the possibility of communicative understanding. But the universality of "good will", in which is rooted the universality of understanding, is, according to Derrida, essentially a metaphysical idea (Derrida, 1989, pp. 52-53). It is a claim about the unchangeable essence of human nature. Derrida discerns

Kantian metaphysical proclivities in this idea of "good will" and hence denounces Gadamer's hermeneutics.

In the Kantian metaphysical framework, "good will" is a universal moral principle which rationalises our actions. This formal principle is thus a rationalising principle. Correspondingly, the idea of "good will" in Gadamer serves, according to Derrida, as the highest principle which decides what is "essential" and what is not. That is, it decides what is understandable and what is not understandable. Serving as the condition of understanding, "good will" also maintains the stability of communal life. It is alleged to be a metaphysical belief in the oneness of mankind. But any recourse to the "metaphysics of presence" is subject to deconstructive subversion.

Besides, Derrida argues that "good will" is a redundant principle. His claim is that "good will" cannot be a condition for understanding the other. Even if a person shows willingness and is unbiased in his intentions, the other may not be understood. The other may still remain unsatisfied about not being understood rightly (1989, pp. 53-54). Also, Gadamer doubts if there can ever be an experience of completely understanding the other's meaning. The very idea of "understanding the other", according to him, involves a necessary moment of distance or *interruption*. In other words, there is an inbuilt tension or paradox between the commensurability and incompleteness or inexhaustibility in understanding.

Furthermore, Derrida's point is that the "otherness" of the other can never be got hold of because one's understanding is

always from his own individual standpoint. Our understanding is always coloured by the presuppositions and beliefs we carry along unconsciously. This particular comment seems to have a Nietzschean mooring. Complying with Nietzsche and the general spirit of post-modernism, Derrida stresses the notion of individuality. In Nietzsche, individuality is considered to have a strong relation with power. Every individual wishes to assert his individuality, especially when the other seems to be more powerful. The strong desire to be the master, or rather the fear of being treated as a slave, always presents a threat to consensus or agreement. Given this predominance of the desire for individuality, Derrida doubts if consensus can ever be attained in an interactive situation.²

Derrida may be mistaken in hearing metaphysical echoes of the Kantian good will in Gadamer's reference to good will as a condition of communicative understanding. For Gadamer this good will may be no more than a non-metaphysical pragmatic condition of dialogical understanding. Besides, Gadamer's reference to good will is clearly not to some transcendental faculty. As David Wood comments, "Gadamer's reference can be replaced by expressions that make no reference to a will. We can talk about attitude,

² Derrida's critique of Gadamer's theory of communicative understanding is based on the view that the otherness of the other cannot be grasped by us. So long as Nietzsche's notion of "will to power" forms the basis of his critique, Derrida seems to be believing in the thesis of incommensurability. If the other person is beyond our grasp, it is because every individual is seen as a whole — a complete, invincible whole. Surely, Gadamer does not propound a belief in the universal oneness of mankind, nor does he claim that the other is completely accessible to us. Instead, he says that the other conditions our own understanding.

Wood is quite perceptive and insightful in defending Gadamer against Derrida right at the point of the tension which is alleged to be damaging to Gadamer's theory of dialogical understanding. What is held to be a tension of inconsistency is exploited by Wood to demonstrate that the hermeneutics of dialogical understanding poses no threat to the (mis)appropriation of the otherness of the other in the name of genuine communicative understanding. Rather, it ensures the availability of a "moment of distance" between oneself and the other in the course of distinctive and ongoing events of understanding. Although there are events of dialogical understanding between the self and the other in the sense of convergence or fusion of horizons, there are also other, non-thematized modes of dialogical relationship (such as friendship) in which the aspired convergence of horizons is never fully attained. Wood tries to articulate this point in a way that identifies a strikingly Derridean angle in Gadamer's thought, as the following passage brings to light:

This has been achieved by exploiting what could be called a tension in Gadamer's thought, between the analysis of understanding as an event that takes place at the point of fusion of horizons, or as a process that presupposes the possibility of such finite convergence, on the one hand, and the recognition that non-thematized relationships involve, in a positive not privative sense, a never-ending dialogue in which fusion, we might say, is forever deferred. This moment of distance is in some sense always recoverable even at the moment of understanding, even at the moment at which I understand what you are saying quite as clearly as if I had caught a ball you had thrown to me. Derrida's version of this adds that this moment is essential for any relation to be a relation to the other *qua* other (1990, p. 122).

What is important to remember here is that Gadamer's theory of understanding is to be placed within the boundary set, on the

one hand, by what might be called hermeneutic closure (that is complete understanding) and, on the other, by endless prolongation of the process of dialogical or conversational engagement. The fault with Derrida's critique is to have focused only on the aspect of closure. Rightly understood, Gadamer's idea is that one is as much risked by the possibility of oneself being alienated in the process of appropriating the alien standpoint as one is likely to grasp the other through successful appropriation. It is in and through the endless dialectic of appropriation and alienation that the dialogical self comes to understand itself progressively and reconstitute its identity.

This dialectic between appropriation and alienation and the pedagogical value embedded in it constitutes the crux of language. Language, for Gadamer, is always a lived-reality, a living language. And the never-ending conversational character of human language marks the finitude of human existence and, hence, of human historical understanding.

5.3 In Defense of Ricoeur

Deconstructive criticism may also be deemed to have an adverse effect upon Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of narrative identity. For this theory may be alleged to harbour the "metaphysics of presence" in as much as it concerns the question of the identity of the self. However, we believe that this theory can neither be interpreted as metaphysical nor as involving the notions of identity and permanence considered to be the opposite of difference and change. Instead, Ricoeur's theory about the self is

non-metaphysical and even in conformity with some of the salient features of deconstruction.

As we have noted in the preceding chapter, Ricoeur's distinction between *idem* (sameness-identity) and *ipse* (selfhood) makes it clear that it is a mistake to construe all identity questions in the metaphysical sense of the term, i.e. substantial permanence in time. The question of the identity of the human subject is not a "what"-question demanding an answer as to what is the X which is identical with itself through changing time, but a "who"-question that can be raised in the context of human action and passion. When, for example, it is asked "Who did X?", we look for a person A, identifying him through a proper name, who can then be held to be responsible for a particular act. The identity question with regard to the self is precisely about an agent — a moral agent, who, as Ricoeur says, is an "acting and suffering being".

Since the identity question is here termed the "who" question, we can notice a significant change that it has brought about in the context of the subjectivity of the individual. The context within which this issue emerges is that of the philosophy of action rather than that of the philosophy of knowledge and reflection. This subjectivity is not contemplated within the purview of Cartesian rationalism where the *Cogito*, the rational self, is said to be capable of unmediated reflection upon its inner core. Nor is it a Platonic soul-substance. It is even far from being a Humean illusory subject transposed on to the bundle

of perceptions. All these are, for Ricoeur, misguided attempts to give a *what*-answer to an essentially *who*-question.

The identity question concerns the narrative identity of an individual being which emerges as a result of the narrative rendering of one's lived-reality or lived-temporality. It is only by providing a narrative order to the otherwise diffused, dispersed, and apparently conflicting experiential reality of one's life that one obtains a narrative identity which is oneself. Narrative identity is a matter of understanding the meaning of one's life which is not possible without reflecting upon or interpreting one's history stretching between life and death. A meaningful construal of the actions and episodes of one's life in terms of a narrative discourse generates a sense of identity in a person.

A narrative articulation of one's life, however, does not convey the sense of a seamless identity. Since the narrative that a person tells about himself is constructed out of the pre-figured, incoherent, repressed stories, it is a constant activity of what Ricoeur calls "analytic working through". And the "working through" of the confused and incoherent structure of life is a ceaseless task through which a subject realizes himself. The identity that he finally assigns to himself is not a fixed characterization of his own being. The narrativisation of one's history is instead a creative activity towards the shaping of one's character. And this shaping of one's character is never a complete task; for a person can configure and refigure his lived-reality in numerous possible ways. In Ricoeur's own words:

Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents (which, thus, should not really be called the same events), so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives (1983, p. 248).

Having ruled out the possibility that Ricoeur's "narrative identity" thesis is suggestive of a fixed identity in the sense implied by the notion of an immutable metaphysical substance, it can now safely be said that Derrida's deconstructive criticism does not find a real target in the hermeneutic theory of self-identity or the theory of narrative self-understanding proposed by Ricoeur. The hermeneutic theory of personal identity is developed in a novel way that avoids having to invoke the notion of a fixed and determinate existential locus, a self-same centre of consciousness, which inevitably carries the load of the metaphysics of presence.

Furthermore, Ricoeur's theory of personal identity in terms of narrative identity has the virtue of exploiting the concept of narrative patterning, or emplotment, in such a way that the narratively secured identity-conditions for the individuation of the human individual are necessarily different from the rigid and inflexible identity-conditions that are referred to in the individuation of static entities. There is, that is to say, an essential semantic openedness to the notion of emplotment or narrative patterning, for there are numerous ways in which a living human individual can, as it were, read meaningful unity or cohesiveness into the experiential array of life. There is not the narrative configuration that a particular life must be perceived as articulating for that life to secure or generate a

sense of self-identity. On the contrary, narrative self-understanding is characteristically open to creative configurational self-appraisal.

The above evaluation of Derrida's critique *vis-a-vis* the theories of the two contemporary hermeneutic philosophers, namely Gadamer and Ricoeur, provides reasons not to reject the issue of subjectivity and self-understanding as theoretically superfluous, but to theorize on it from an angle that is thoroughly untraditional and non-metaphysical — which indeed is the distinctively hermeneutic angle.

Both Gadamer and Ricoeur provide us with a new direction to understand the issue of subjectivity or self-understanding from the vantage-point of their distinctive hermeneutic theories. They both believe that certain traditional metaphysical and epistemological concepts need re-evaluation rather than a complete rejection.³ Gadamer himself redefines the notions of "truth" and "knowledge" in terms that are radically non-traditional. Similarly, Ricoeur reconstitutes the entire issue of personal identity in non-traditional terms and makes the question of

³Madison goes to the extent of saying that Derrida's deconstruction is not only destructive, it is also frivolous. While comparing Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy with that of Derrida's deconstruction, he finds that the former also presents a threat to traditional metaphysics. Besides, he notices that unlike Derrida, Gadamer's anti-metaphysical stance does not land us into nihilism but gives us hope to continue philosophy from another perspective. (See "Beyond Seriousness and Frivolity: A Gadamerian Response to Deconstruction" in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, Hugh J. Silverman (ed.), 1991, Routledge: New York and London.

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self-identity and self-knowledge or self-understanding answerable within the hermeneutics of narrative understanding. One could justifiably say that these two hermeneutic projects of self-understanding have the virtue of being constructive philosophical theories from a non-deconstructive standpoint.

TOWARDS A COMPOSITE THEORY OF HERMENEUTIC SELF-UNDERSTANDING

6.1 Effective-historical Consciousness, Dialogicality and the Making of History

Despite the fact that Heidegger himself distrusts his earlier hermeneutic-phenomenological programme and turns towards poetry, Gadamer sees the meaningfulness of Heidegger's critique of subjectivity contained in that programme. And his critique is fatal to the entire western metaphysical tradition. Heidegger's critique provides Gadamer with the argument that there is no particular conceptual determination, no matter how strong it is, which we are strictly governed by. A tradition can always be criticised and revised. In Gadamer's words, "no conceptual language represents an unbreakable constraint upon thought if only the thinker allows himself to trust language; that is, if he engages in dialogue with other thinkers and ways of thinking" (1989, p. 23). Gadamer approves of Heidegger's programme because he believes that it is not about the Being of beings. That is, there is no presumption about any transcendental reality whose discovery is the main target of the enterprise. What is instead crucial about the question of the meaning of Being is that it is marked by a fundamental finitude. The hermeneutic-phenomenological inquiry to which this ontological question is submitted does not yield any fixed meaning; rather, it announces the inexhaustibility of the experience of meaning.

In a Heideggerian ontological bent of mind, Gadamer announces: "Being which can be understood is language" (1975, p.

432). The fundamental truth that is embedded in the phrase is expressed by him in the following way: "what was implied thereby was that that which is can never be completely understood. This is implied insofar as everything that goes under the name of language always refers beyond that which achieves the status of a proposition. That which is to be understood is that which comes into language, but of course it is always that which is taken as something, taken as true [*wahr-genommen*]. This is the hermeneutical dimension in which Being "manifests itself" (1989, p. 25). In so far as language is the only medium through which we can have an access to Being, there is nothing like a pure self-manifestation of Being.

Fundamental to Heidegger's "hermeneutics of existence" or "hermeneutics of facticity" is the idea of the inexhaustibility of human understanding. Heidegger attributes this finitude to the circular character of understanding. The circularity of understanding binds the subject and the object in a circular relation, though neither is deducible from the other. Because of this relation not only does the subject not have any sovereignty over the object, but it is also dependent on the object of understanding. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains that being-in-the-world is an inevitable condition for understanding. This overcoming of the subject-object dichotomy is very central to Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. The critique takes away the sovereignty of the rational metaphysical self and places it within the world. Understanding thus no longer finds its locus in the

pure subjectivity of the subject, but in the subject in so far as it is a being-in-the-world.

The existential extension of the concept of understanding (understanding as an existential mode of Dasein and not a mere cognitive capacity) receives a significant place in Gadamer's theory of dialogical understanding. Following Heidegger, Gadamer does not regard instrumentality to be the fundamental feature of understanding. He believes that we notice this feature of understanding only when our natural process of working with it faces any obstruction. Gadamer explains:

Just as one who uses a tool does not treat that tool as an object, but works with it, so too the understanding in which Dasein understands itself in its Being and in its world is not a way of comporting itself toward definite objects of knowledge, but is rather the carrying out of Being-in-the-world itself (1989, p. 23).

The co-existence of "understanding" and "being-in-the-world" allows Gadamer to argue that understanding is not merely a cognitive capacity possessed by the rational subject, but a feature of the subject's worldly existence. Therefore understanding is more like an existential property of human beings.

While understanding is existentially characterized by Heidegger, it is further characterized by Gadamer in terms of dialogicality. One might say that the feature of dialogicality, or dialogue as a feature of human existence, draws out much more of the essence of the human subject as a being-in-the-world. Gadamer's distinctive contribution in this regard is his emphatic pronouncement that the existential constitution of the human

subject is not that of individual subjectivity set against its counterpart — the other. Rather it is communal intersubjectivity that defines the existential locus of the subject, and the individuality of the subject is irreducibly communicative or dialogical. Since there is neither ontic isolation nor epistemic solitude in terms of which the self is definable, the communicative or dialogical conception of the self is strongly antithetical to the Cartesian conception of the self.

Dialogue, for Gadamer, is not a practical requirement to overcome any conflicting situation or conflict of understanding, but is the essence of human historical existence. There is a fundamental inseparability of I and thou in every act or episode of understanding. Since the otherness always lurks in understanding, the subject is not an independent rational agent *vis-a-vis* another similarly constituted agent. Its very mode of being is that of communicative existence: it exists only because the other exists, with which it is always bound up in a conversational nexus. One might say that it exists conversationally or communicatively. To be oneself is, as it were, to converse, whereby one inevitably becomes an ineradicable co-participant of a conversational complex. To exist is to co-exist with the other in the relation of a dialogue.

Gadamer grants that each one of us as human beings participates in the ongoing conversation of mankind. What accounts for the possibility of commensurability is our participation in a common cultural matrix. Thus our individual human identity depends upon our being united by some common accord at the communal level.

And our understanding of ourselves is correspondingly determined by our individual entrenchment in a community of co-participants roughly sharing certain world-views and partaking of customs and other institutional practices. However, this commonality exists only at the most general level; for below the general level there exist differences of various sorts to affect, in qualitatively distinguishable ways, our conversational co-existence. Therefore, the historical contingencies of our actual life generate constant tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the sense of belonging and the sense of strangeness.

Given the conversational or dialogical essence of human-historical existence, we have no alternative to finding ourselves already belonging to a particular historical space of conversational unity — a space of beliefs, prejudices, customs and other institutional practices which we readily become conversant with. This is what is known as our cultural belongingness, our inheritance of a tradition, our sense of familiarity. And when it comes to our understanding of ourselves as historically rooted, tradition-bred beings, we can never attain a perfect grasp of our own reality, nor is it right to expect here objective certainty of the kind characteristic of scientific knowledge. Human-historical understanding remains essentially incomplete and less than transparent precisely because the human subject cannot undergo complete self-purification so as to be able to determine some sort of objective historical truth from a transcendental vantage point.

In point of fact, there is no transcendental epistemological point of vantage from which historical understanding can attain objective knowledge about human reality. This is because historical understanding is grounded in historical consciousness, which is not "pure" consciousness that can fully transcend the impact of tradition. Gadamer describes this mode of consciousness as "effective-historical consciousness" — consciousness in which our historicity is immanent (1975, p. 305). For this consciousness there is no going above history altogether. It is consciousness of the continuity of the tradition to which we inevitably belong; it is our awareness of our identity in terms of the beliefs, world-views and other presuppositions transmitted to us through the mediation of customs and institutional practices.

This consciousness of historical continuity is a hermeneutic experience rather than an intuitive knowledge. This is because historical experience is structured by interpretations in as much as human-historical reality, unlike physical reality, is constituted by diverse expressions of human intentionality. Thus the historically conditioned human existence is hermeneutically accessed and represented by historical consciousness in the form of experience rather than in the form of knowledge as involving determinate affirmation and negation. This hermeneutically constituted experience is what constitutes human understanding, or the understanding yielded by historical consciousness. This experience derives its cognitive significance from an immanent reflectivity of historical consciousness, which means that self-understanding is never complete because, as reflection shows,

every new experience added to the already acquired corpus of experiences in the course of existential history necessarily warns the incompleteness of self-understanding.

Since every experience is a new entry into what Ricoeur calls the "space of experience", reflective historical consciousness cannot but represent self-understanding as a matter of being always open to experience and realizing human finitude or limitation in the mode of experience itself. In other words, the essentially incompleteness of self-understanding being "experienced" means that this finitude is an irreducible feature of historically conditioned subjectivity. That our being so "experienced" is quite different from our being knowledgeable, in the sense of knowledge as conceptual determination, is a very important distinction made by Gadamer, and this distinction is impressively delineated by Weinsheimer in the following way:

Anyone who is aware that he has something still to learn is aware of his finitude and his limits.... Gadamer concurs that experience consists in negation and that knowledge consists in determinate negation. But since he does not conceive of knowledge as the end of experience, he considers the perfection of experience not as perfect knowledge but as being perfectly experienced. The openness to experience which this perfection implies consists in indeterminate negation. Being experienced means knowing one's limits, but having this knowledge does not imply that one knows some determinate thing. Quite the contrary, being experienced, being open to experience, being conscious of finitude, means knowing that one does not know (1985, p. 206).

One can clearly observe Weinsheimer's stress on the cognitive-epistemic import of hermeneutic experience, namely knowing that, due to human finitude and historical contingency, our understanding of ourselves is inescapably incomplete, and also

knowing that the "perfection" of experience is nothing other than coming to realize the essential indeterminacy of self-understanding. Hence historical consciousness, which is the bearer of hermeneutic experience, indicates the possibility of self-understanding in terms of a ceaseless reflective process or *bildung* — an openness towards others. The process of self-understanding, in as much as it requires openness towards others, is a process of perfection of experience.

Gadamer considers the Socratic dialectic of dialogue to be the paradigm of the perfection of experience. It is only in Socratic dialogues that we recognize our own limitations through the other. The other in a dialogue points out what we are not when we are questioned in a dialogue. It is only in this process of question and answer that actual learning can take place. And, very importantly, for Gadamer, a dialogue signifies a process and not a fixed result. There is no statement-like determinacy and fixity in a dialogue. Semantic indeterminacy, Gadamer says, coincides with being experienced or being open to experience.

It should be apparent from the above discussion that self-understanding is defined in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy by two concepts, namely the concept of effective-historical consciousness and that of dialogicality. Since every instance of understanding is *ipso facto* an awareness of our own existence, all understanding, for Gadamer, is self-understanding. In this sense understanding is an ontic feature of the human individual. Consequently, effective-historical consciousness or the awareness of our being embedded in history, which defines

self-understanding, is an ontological truth about human existence.

It seems, however, that justice cannot be done to self-understanding if it is defined mainly in terms of effective-historical consciousness. For if effective-historical consciousness is to be taken as the chief determinant of our understanding of ourselves, our self-consciousness would appear to be the representation of ourselves as being "appropriated" by history. We would then be ontologically identified as beings shaped by the causal power of history. Although this is true, this is only half the truth. And the other half is true in an equally important sense. But what is the other half of the whole truth about ourselves and about self-understanding? Granted our historicity, are we to be understood as products of history, in the sense of our being what we are due wholly to the effectiveness of history?

Such questions arise because Gadamer seems to overlook the fact that, besides being embedded in or determined by history, we are also *makers* of history. The fact that we ourselves are history does not necessarily imply that we simply continue to show fidelity to tradition; we also make history in so far as we are "acting and suffering" beings. The continuity of the past in the present of our life does not underrate the fact that we are *agents* of history. If it is true that the past questions us before we question it, it is also true that the past answers us to the extent we question it. And when we make the past "answerable" to us by adopting an inquisitive and critical stance towards it, it

is as though we assert our effective individuality over tradition and the past from the centre stage of our living present.

Although it is true that we find ourselves engulfed by history before we have a chance to choose to adopt a critical stance towards it, it is also true that the effectiveness of the past upon our present does not render the present an ineffective phase of history. In other words, it is not by being lost to the past, as it were, that the present gains a place within effective history. The present is effective in its own right, since it is in the present that there takes place what Gadamer calls the "fusion of horizons", i.e. the real moment of understanding characterized by the assimilation of the unfamiliar through the perfection of experience. The fusion of horizons is a testimony to the historical agent's "appropriation" of history — a testimony to the effectiveness of the individual in bringing about conversational unity against the backdrop of the diversity of allegiance to traditions. In Ricoeur's words, "effective-history, we might say, is what takes place without us. The fusion of horizons is what we attempt to bring about. Here the work of history and the work of the historian mutually assist each other" (1983, p. 221).

Given that the fusion of horizons is not a happening that we witness as passive bystanders of history, but is actively accomplished by us in the midst of our immersion in history, our understanding of effective history — tradition and the past — is a decipheration of the text of history. This accomplishment of the present on our part is an "application" of our interpretative

consciousness to the text of the past, whereby our receptivity to the past becomes critical and a rupture is caused in the continuity of effective history. And it is through dialogues that we realize this accomplishment; every fusion of horizons that a dialogical relation of participation testifies to is characterizable as our making inroads to history, so to speak.

What emerges from the foregoing discussion of the effectiveness of the present in making significant inroads into history is an emphasis on the effectiveness of us as historical agents and as interpreters of history or the past. But if the present can really be viewed as historically effective, in so far as we historical agents and interpreters are makers of history, then the present will have to be characterized as a significant and active moment of the entire continuum of history with the past and the future as the two outmost moments. That is to say, the present will have to be deemed as the historical present that mediates between the inherited tradition (or the past) and the horizon of expectation (or the future). It is only when we adjust the past to the structure of the above kind of grand historical narrative that we can truly appreciate the dialectic of the ontology of tradition-boundedness and the disclosure of ontic possibilities.

Such narrative structuring of the past and the assignment of a mediating role to the present is absent in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. For it seems that Gadamer overplays the fact of our receptivity to the past; the ontology of effective-historical consciousness gains ascendancy in his thought. The fact that

understanding is historically constituted — that is the ontology of understanding — overshadows the equally important fact that we are also hermeneutic agents of history. In other words, the legitimate and unignorable notion of the "historical present" is overlooked or undervalued by Gadamer in his enthusiasm for highlighting the fact of our "being affected by the past". And if this observation is true, this indicates a deficiency both in his account of historical consciousness, and in the theory of self-understanding which is extractable from his hermeneutic philosophy.

6.2 Profiles of Self-identity: Social and Personal

It is the alleged recuperation of the subjectivity of the "acting and suffering beings" in and through the revised and enlarged notion of historical consciousness that brings to light the hidden as well as neglected dimension of self-understanding in Gadamer's theory of dialogical understanding. This dimension of subjectivity is, as a matter of fact, the question of self-identity. And it is of crucial importance to realize that a hermeneutic theory of self-understanding cannot be complete without a theory of self-identity. Yet it has been felt that Gadamer's theory of dialogical understanding, in as much as it is grounded in the communal-communicative essence of the self, does not accommodate the important truth that a philosophical self-portrayal cannot avoid the canvas of the self's own distinctive lived-reality. There is a personal existential space for the individual subject which is separable from the social existential space, and

correspondingly there is the existential constitution of individuality that depends upon, but is not reducible to, the communally constituted role of the individual.

Of course it is true that the story of an individual life is constituted by and embedded in some larger, meaning-giving structure of social reality. But, finally, no life is simply reducible to the larger meaning-giving structure of which it partakes and by which it is constituted. On this irreducible individual subjectivity MacIntyre's pronouncement is worth-quoting: "I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else's, that has its own particular meaning" (1981, p. 202). There is, in other words, a personal identity-profile to each individual agent of history that can be depicted hermeneutically apart from the social identity-profile which is portrayed dialogically.

It is Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy that the grand narrative structure of historical consciousness is shown to be constitutive of the three temporal modalities discussed above, namely, being affected by the past, the historical present, and their relation to the future. In understanding the mediating role of the historical present between the past (that is the "space of experience") and the future (that is the "horizon of expectation") as conceived by Ricoeur, we must carefully allude to an echo of this idea in Heidegger's idea of "making present". This allusion to Heidegger's idea is, of course, by way of clarifying the point of difference between Heidegger and Ricoeur. Ricoeur himself is careful to distinguish the meaning of the historical present from

the meaning of Heidegger's "making present". In Heidegger the "making present" is just another moment in our circumspective, concerned existence. Ricoeur adds the idea of "initiative" to Heidegger's "making present" and thereby overcomes its inauthenticity. The moment of initiation, which has the form of "I can" and "I do", is a moment of decision and action. Since the actual doing of something is a mere beginning and not a completion, there is nothing momentary about it, nor does it have a passive observation-like inauthenticity. In Ricoeur's words, "to begin is to begin to continue — a work has to follow" (1983, p. 230).

The endurance of the "historical present" also establishes, for Ricoeur, a link between lived-experience and the things of the world. For Ricoeur Merleau Ponty's idea of the "lived-body" bridges the gulf between the physical and the psychical, between cosmic exteriority and reflective interiority. Ricoeur's concept of historical present along with the notions of "initiative" and "lived body" changes the profile of historical consciousness. It links the ontology of belongingness to the critical reception of the tradition. By the same token, it recuperates the subjectivity of the "acting and suffering beings" *vis-a-vis* historical consciousness.

Dialogical understanding as theorized by Gadamer is emphatic upon the depiction of the social identity-profile of the human subject. For the identity of the human subject is determined by the socio-communal fact that the subject is fully a participant of a dialogical-communicative situation. In a sense this subjectivity

of the individual is delimited and circumscribed by what may be termed social or collective subjectivity. It hardly concerns Gadamer whether there can also be an exploration into the patterns of self-constitution of individual subjectivity independently of the socio-communal, communicative-dialogical constitution of self-identity. The latter kind of structuration of self-constitution appears to Gadamer to be definitive of the portrayal of the human identity-profile. As we have said earlier, to be is to communicate (or, as we may say now, to be is, as it were, to communicatively-dialogically be). Yet, it does seem plausible, and possible, to delineate the structure and pattern of self-constitution in terms of individual subjectivity — that is in relative independence from the terms and frames of collective-communicative identity. And it is not just plausible or possible; it is also a necessary direction of exploration, rather self-exploration, in so far as an adequate, comprehensive theory of self-understanding is concerned.

However, it is not to be misunderstood here that raising the question of the structure of self-constitution for a personal identity-profile in relative independence from the socio-communal, communicative-dialogical context is tantamount to raising an ontological issue, that is the issue of the being of individual subjectivity as ontically distinct from that of collective subjectivity. Indeed, the whole issue is not an ontological concern, but a concern of providing an adequate dual-aspect characterization of the human subject, or the self-conscious historical agent. In other words, it is not that there exists

some kind of a private "monological" self as the interior counterpart of a public dialogical self located in the space of collective subjectivity. The fact of the matter is not dualism about selves, but dualism about aspects of the self. Whereas dialogicality highlights the outer communitarian aspect, there is also the inner space of individual identity the structure and texture of which deserves equal theoretical attention. To highlight the latter aspect one must look beyond Gadamer and especially towards what we have described as the theory of narrative self-understanding developed by Ricoeur. We have to look beyond historical consciousness to a notion of "constructive" self-consciousness explicable in narrative terms.

This inner aspect of the human subject is highlighted, though not in narrative terms, by Heidegger through the concept of authentic existence, which gives Dasein its irreducible individuality. For Heidegger, it is only when Dasein anticipates its own death that it appropriates its own being. And certainly such a resolution demands a deviation from the "they-self" which only characterizes our inauthenticity. Although one does not have to go as far as Heidegger's own position which runs the risk of being solipsistic, there indeed is a need to turn towards the existential individuality of the subject, so that the individual subject's personal identity-profile does not get overshadowed by a magnified dialogical-communitarian representation of its being. It is Ricoeur's theory of narrative self-understanding that does justice to the phenomenology of internal self-constitution.

Narrative consciousness differs from the so-called effective-historical consciousness in virtue of the fact that, unlike the latter in which the past is represented as leaving its impact upon the present, the former represents the three-fold relation of time, namely the past and the future mediated by the present, as a unified experiential moment of narrative configuration. This narrative synthesis of internal time-consciousness constitutes the framework of self-constitution and self-identity. The self, or the life of the self, emerges as and when the discrete episodes of life are woven into a narrative, where the thread of life binds together moments that are remembered with expected moments of anticipation through the lived-experiences of the living present.

There is a very close relationship between life and narrative in so far as the structure of life is analogous to that of narrative. Human reality, or the reality of human life, is not a structureless sequence of isolated events, but forms a certain kind of unity or coherence. This unity or coherence is that of lived-temporality and the unitary structure of lived-temporality is narrative — the beginning-middle-end structure of narrativity. Husserl's phenomenological theory of time-consciousness shows that even the most passive human experience (i.e., a present moment) involves tacit anticipation or what he calls protention, as well as retention of the just past. It means that we cannot experience anything as happening, as present, except against the background of what it succeeds and what we anticipate will succeed it. Our very capacity to experience what in our present is the case spans

future and past. As such, the idea of a mere or pure sequence of isolated life-events can only be thought of in logical abstraction from the already configured matrix of lived-experience. Experienced events are always charged with the significance they derive from our retentions and protentions.

What is true of an experience as a micro-history of life is, of course, true of the extended life conceived as a coherent totality of such experiences. And if it is true of our most passive experiences, it is all the more true of our active life, in which we quite explicitly consult our past experience, envisage the future and view the present as a passage between the two. Whatever we encounter within our experience either facilitates or becomes an obstacle to our plans, expectations and wishes. It is in this sense that life is structured, and the structure is narrative. Lived-temporality is narrative temporality. Since lived-temporality or the experience of time is essentially configurational, not just sequential, the structure of life is that of a narrative configuration.

It is a celebrated claim of hermeneutics in general, and of Ricoeur in particular, that life is not simply a biological phenomenon but symbolically mediated. As such, the reality of life is an interpretative process for the living subject. That is why, as Taylor says, the human subject "cannot be understood simply as an object among objects, for his life incorporates an interpretation, an expression of which cannot exist unexpressed, because the self that is to be interpreted is essentially that of a being who self-interprets" (1985, p. 75). And if the

interpretative process is constitutive of the life as well as the self whose life it is, then life is also a narrative text, or a text-analogue, that contains stories, or life-stories, about the self's actions and passions. "The individual can be said to be 'tangled up in stories' which happen to him before any story is recounted" (Ricoeur, 1991 , p. 30). And "life can be understood only through the stories that we tell about it" (*op. cit.*, p. 31).

Since human experience is already riddled with stories, there is a genuine demand for narrative immanent to experience itself. Indeed it is a great insight of psychoanalysis to suggest that we might conceive of our lives as untold stories, or virtual stories; recounting a life would then be merely articulating these, rather than imposing them on an alien context. The patient is helped by the analyst to draw out of the scattered fragments of his lived stories, dreams and conflictual episodes a narrative that he can avow and find intelligible. What this narrative interpretation of psychoanalytic theory implies is that, to quote Ricoeur, "the story of a life grows out of stories that have not been recounted and that have been repressed in the direction of actual stories which the subject could take charge of and consider to be constitutive of his *personal identity*" (*op. cit.*, p. 30). Ricoeur endorses psychoanalytic theory's narrative intent and believes it to be generally applicable to human self-understanding. To live a life is, truly or authentically, to be in quest of a narrative, and the narrative quest is ultimately the quest for narrative identity.

It is by reference to the idea of life as a narrative quest and a quest for narrative (personal) identity that we can understand the "failure" of a life as the failure to grasp life as constituting a narrative unity, which is tantamount to our not being able to find narrative identity in ourselves. Such a failure is exemplified poignantly in Oliver Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. Discussing the case of a patient who suffers from memory disorders associated with Korsakov's syndrome, and who has a memory span of only a few seconds, Sacks writes: "Unable to maintain a genuine narrative or continuity, unable to maintain a genuine inner world, he is driven to the proliferation of pseudo-narratives, in a pseudo-continuity, pseudo-worlds peopled by pseudo-people, phantoms" (1987, p. 111). Such a patient, says Sacks, "must literally make himself (and his world) up every moment" (*op.cit*, p. 110). The point here is that loss of memory makes it impossible to generate a sense of coherent narrative unity in a life, and without such a narrative coherence there cannot be any sense of personal identity.

Sacks's example illustrates the point that the persistence of the narration of experience is necessary in order to exist as a meaningful human subject, and that it is through narrative interpretation of the contents of experience that the identity or selfhood of the subject is secured. Sacks makes these points explicit in the following passage:

We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative — whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a "narrative", and that this narrative *is* us, our identities.... Each of us *is* a singular narrative, which *is* constructed,

continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations.... To be ourselves we must *have* ourselves — possess, if need be repossess, our life-stories (*op.cit*, pp. 110-11).

Thus, it is because life is an inner narrative, or each of us is a "singular narrative", that narrative understanding is the proper approach to the human domain. And in so far as self-understanding is a matter of narrative interpretation of the experienced contents of life, self-identity or the sense of selfhood is a narrative construct. Narrativity is a principle of intelligibility, a meaning-endowing synthetic activity. Self-understanding is tantamount to self-employment in the sense that to understand oneself as a self or subject is to bring the heterogeneous elements of experience into the cohesive unity of a plot.

It is the hermeneutic idea of the self as a narrative construct, or the "definition of subjectivity in terms of narrative identity" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 32), that implies the rejection of both subjectivism and the metaphysics of presence. For in denying that the experience of life (i.e., subjectivity) is the experience of an incoherent series of events, the narrative view of the self implies that there is an immanent narrativity to experience that accounts for the narrative reconstruction of the self. On the other hand, this view has no allegiance to the metaphysics of presence in as much as it also rejects the position that the self is an immutable substance that persists through temporally extended experiences of a life-time. That is, the unity and continuity of the self is not substantial but narrative.

When the problem of personal identity is so tackled as to avoid the implausibility of both subjectivism and the rationalist metaphysics of an immutable substance, the hermeneutic view of self-understanding acquires the distinctive merit of flexibility and catholicity. In construing the identity of an individual life as a narrative construct, or rather a narrative reconstruction of the quasi-narrative flow of life, we are provided with a model which is not a rigid all-or-nothing model of strict identity in the sense of sameness (*idem*), but a different model, that of selfhood (*ipse*), which has the desired advantage of being able to accommodate the contingency and revisability of self-identity. For it is true that, given the complexity and dynamism of life, and given its historical contingency, life is a field of a constructive activity, the activity of narrative reconstruction, by which the subject attempts to discover an identity which already admits of revision and reconstitution.

Narrative self-understanding thus defines individual human subjectivity as a narrative self-constitution the status of which can be appreciated as falling between sheer change and absolute identity. The diachronic expansion of life can be characterized as the interplay of the sedimentation of the past and creative innovation of the present in the light of future-oriented imaginative variations of our own selves. There is a continuous need of narrative self-interpretation in view of the fact that our own self-narratives are constantly influenced by the narratives of our culture. As Ricoeur remarks, "we never cease to reinterpret the narrative identity that constitutes us, in the light of the

narratives proposed to us by our culture" (1991, p. 32). Self-knowledge or self-understanding is therefore mediated by the symbolically constituted life-world, the world of various cultural signs and designs, in the light of which are composed the narratives of everyday life. In other words, apart from the assimilation of the sediments of the past or tradition in our present life, there also takes place the creative appropriation of the prevailing cultural narratives — of which Ricoeur reckons literature to be the most effective factor of symbolic mediation — hence we receive imaginative character-roles with which we can compare our actual existential roles and thereby reconstitute ourselves.

Thus, a theory of narrative self-understanding is a theory of narrative self-constitution in the course of a life understood as a narrative quest. In the process of this quest one is able to develop a sense of oneself as a subject — not as a narcissistic ego but as a self "instructed by cultural symbols" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 33). The hermeneutic view therefore is that self-knowledge or self-understanding is irreducibly a matter of self-interpretation.

6.3 The Composite Portrait of the Self

From the above excursus into a theory of narrative self-understanding it should be clear how this theory differs from the dialogical theory of self-understanding. The difference is between the individual narrative essence and the social communicative essence of the human subject. While the communal participant-of-a-dialogue identity of the subject is defined by

the communicative-dialogical praxis of human reality, it is narrative self-employment as well as self-interpretation that determines the personal quest for identity in the sense of selfhood. "Life in quest of a narrative" is necessarily a singular reflexive journey, in which one's own life-story is recounted and whereby the sense of being oneself is creatively discovered. "Each of us is a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us" — as we have already quoted this apt remark of Sacks's.

By contrast, the dialogical-communicative self is a self always defined relationally rather than in its singularity. This self is the self in-relation-with the other, the I of the inseparable I-thou complex — the dialogical social praxis of human existence.

Notwithstanding the above difference between the two theories, it must not be overlooked that they represent complementary delineations of one and the same concept, namely the hermeneutically defined concept of the human individual and correspondingly, of self-understanding. Both theories take the common "linguistic turn" to construe the self as symbolically mediated, and thereby both reject the rationalist conception of immediate self-knowledge. Both self-conceptions are uncontaminated by the discredited metaphysics of presence that underpins the substantive view of the self. The self is now located in the matrix of language or sign-system, and that matrix is at once dialogical and narrative.

To the extent that the matrix of the self is dialogical or communicative, the self reaches out to the other and reflects upon itself through the other. This immersion of the self in the communicative social praxis makes possible some sort of epistemological unity of mankind. At least this is what is implied by the fusion of horizons. On the other hand, to the extent that the matrix of the self is narrative, and that the life of an individual is a personal quest for a narrative, the self recognizes itself as it recounts its life-stories. And this self-recognition is also self-constitution facilitated by narrative interpretation. Were it not for such continuous narrative self-interpretation, there would not be the possibility of generating any sense of personal identity. And bereft of the sense of one's own identity, there would be no meaningful self for self-understanding.

It is now apparent that an adequate hermeneutic theory of self-understanding, must be at once dialogical and narrative; they represent, respectively, the outer social dimension and the inner personal dimension of self-understanding. Hence it is proper to talk about a composite theory, a theory which underlines the fact that the two features of dialogicality and narrativity of human self-understanding are symbiotically related to one another.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have examined the issue of human subjectivity and the human subject's understanding of itself in and through its understanding of the life-world. This examination can be described as an exploration in the hermeneutics of existence in that we have developed a hermeneutic account of the nature of the human subject engaged in the socio-cultural matrix of human existence. We began with a critical discussion of Dilthey's hermeneutic theory of the human sciences with a view to showing how human social reality, conceived as the expression or objectification of the human mind, can only be an object of understanding. Understanding in this context becomes an epistemological-methodological approach, and the entire arena of human-historical reality is to be conceived as a text, or a text-analogue, which needs to be studied, or made sense of, interpretatively.

Our criticism of Dilthey's hermeneutic theory has been that it is quite wrong to expect interpretative understanding of the text of life, or historical reality, to provide us with conclusions with objective certainty, as Dilthey wants it to do. Interpretative understanding is not so much a method of objective knowledge as a sensitive, openended approach to human appraisal of the meaning-suffused attitudes and activities of the human world. The human-historical world is never purged of the opaque intentionality of human subjectivity, and understanding this world is not to be thought of as a way to access objective truths.

That there is no privileged transcendental point of vantage in historical understanding — which is the reason why understanding cannot aim at objective truth, or it cannot amount to making objective knowledge-claims — is a famous criticism of Dilthey that we have observed in our study of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. But Gadamer's critique of objective historical knowledge and understanding has its basis in Heidegger's existential phenomenology. Our being or existence is being-in-the-world, and, more importantly, our mode of being is that of understanding. To be is to understand, and our understanding is never purged of our worldliness or facticity.

Our examination of Heidegger's "ontological turn" in the theory of understanding reveals to us that, even though understanding is rooted in facticity or historicity, there is no account of the epistemology of understanding, that is the role of understanding involved in the possibility of historical knowledge. Here we have compared Heidegger's "fundamental ontology" with Ricoeur's extended and protracted journey to the ontology of understanding through the "long route" of the epistemology of interpretation. The intent of this comparison is to stress the point that understanding is as much a cognitive-epistemic method as it is a mode of being human. And it is our interpretative understanding of social existence through which we acquire knowledge about our own historical reality, which provides the clue to the disclosure of the primordial truth about ourselves as beings constituted by understanding.

While truth for Heidegger is a matter of disclosure, of "laying open the things as they are", for Ricoeur it is a matter of constitution or construction by virtue of the epistemic-cognitive operation of understanding. Hence Ricoeur believes that the ontological truth about human existence as characterized by "primordial understanding" cannot be disclosed in an unmediated, direct act of phenomenological reflection, but it can be attained through the mediation of a reflective study of the epistemology of historical understanding. Historical understanding is a process of interpretative appreciation of the symbolically constituted historical world consisting of meaning-suffused human practices, social and cultural institutions and other works that testify to the purposive self-expressions of human beings. Ricoeur's point is that it is in the actual operation of the epistemic-cognitive activity of interpretation on the part of the socio-historically engaged human agent that we can discern the ontological truth of primordial understanding as constitutive of the fundamental condition for the possibility of meaningful human existence.

We have interpreted both Gadamer's and Ricoeur's hermeneutic theorizations about the ontology of human socio-historical reality as well as the epistemology of self-understanding in "linguistic" terms. For both these thinkers human reality is linguistically constituted in the sense that language necessarily mediates in the relations between human beings and the world (referentiality), between human beings and other human beings (communicability), and between human beings and themselves (self-understanding).

Characterizing this as the "linguistic turn" in hermeneutic philosophy, we have identified two distinct theories of self-understanding: the communicative or dialogical theory developed by Gadamer, and the theory of narrative self-understanding propounded by Ricoeur.

We have represented Gadamer's theory in ontological terms as "to be (a human individual) is to communicate." The existence and identity of the human individual is determined by the dialogical nexus within which he relates himself to others. The existential fabric of mankind is woven by the threads of conversation, and the individual subject understands itself by virtue of its participation in ongoing dialogues.

The other theory, propounded by Ricoeur, is that of narrative self-understanding. Just as we understand others by appreciating the life-stories which they narrate, so we understand ourselves by virtue of reflective articulation of the immanent narratives of our psychological life. It is only when we as subjects bring the disparate and dispersed episodes and experience into the meaningful unity of a narrative configuration that our own lives acquire individual identity. Personal identity is therefore a matter of narrative identity, and an intelligible life is a quest for such a narrative.

We have considered the question of whether the two hermeneutic theories of self-understanding are vulnerable to deconstruction. Our argument has been that nowhere do these theories invoke the discredited "metaphysics of presence". Thus, although the "I-thou" dialogical unity presupposes the

conversational essence of mankind and the presence of "good will" for the possibility of communicative liaison, these two features should not be mistaken as implying some sort of metaphysical unity or oneness of mankind. Good will in this context may be understood as a pragmatic requirement.

Since the theory of narrative self-understanding involves the notion of narrative identity (which for Ricoeur is identity-as-selfhood), it may be feared that this theory also invokes the discredited notion of identity-as-presence. But we have argued that this fear is unfounded, because narrative identity is never meant to be a substantive identity characterized by fixity and determinateness. Rather, it is meant to be essentially contrasted with substantive identity. To be oneself is to perceive a life as forming a narrative unity, without there being any underlying substance beneath the narrative construct. And a self, or selfhood, may undergo changes in the form of changes in emplotment or narrative configuration.

We have thus defended a constructive hermeneutic programme against the threat of deconstruction. In the last chapter we have reconsidered the two hermeneutic theories of self-understanding and have observed that, when each theory is assessed independently of the other, what we get is a partial account of the complex issue of self-understanding. Our argument is that an adequate and judicious theory of self-understanding must be at once dialogical and narrative; for the historically situated self has a dual-aspect constitution. That is to say, the self or agent is a

self-identity necessarily depends upon the influence of larger cultural narratives. Although this singular narrative or story of an individual life cannot be imagined independently of its embeddedness in a larger, meaning-giving structure, the subjectivity of this narrative is not therefore reducible to that larger structure of intersubjectivity. It is this irreducible, essential individuality of self-conception that demands the representation of the self in the narrative mode. One might say that this singular narrative is personal in the sense of being intra-subjective.

We have also made it clear that our interpretation of these two theories as portraying two distinct profiles of self-representation is not to be mistaken for two ontologically distinct self-conceptions. Rather the distinction is to be recognized in terms of aspect-dualism; it is the conception of one and the same self as essentially marked by two interpenetrating existential dimensions. The two theories represent the complementary delineations of one and the same concept, that is the hermeneutically defined concept of the human individual and, correspondingly, of self-understanding. Thus we have felt it appropriate to conceptualize the emerging theory as a composite theory, involving as it does a communicative-narrative symbiosis.

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